

THE WOMAN AS REFORMER: A FACET
OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

by

John Louis Oldani, A.B.

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COMMITTEE IN CHARGE OF CANDIDACY:

Associate Professor Martin F. Hasting, S.J.,
Director and Adviser

Associate Professor William B. Faherty, S.J.

Assistant Professor Joseph G. Knapp, S.J.

Assistant Professor Albert J. P. McCarthy

Professor Allen Spitzer

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
II. THE WOMAN AND REFORM.	6
III. THE WOMAN REFORMER: HER IDEOLOGY.	34
IV. THE WOMAN REFORMER: IN FASHION, SONG, CARTOON, AND DRAMA.	56
V. THE WOMAN REFORMER: HER CHARACTER	128
VI. CONCLUSION: THE WOMAN AS REFORMER: A FACET OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER	149
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	166
VITA AUCTORIS	191

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In his important work, America as a Civilization, Max Lerner has called the American woman, "the most continuous American revolutionary."¹ Indeed, if one considers such early reformers as Margaret Brent, who as executrix for Leonard Calvert in the early days of Maryland, demanded but ~~was~~ refused a vote in the House of Burgesses, and Abigail Adams who warned her husband: ". . . in the new code of laws . . . if particular care and attention are not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound to obey the laws in which we have no voice or representation,"² Lerner's point seems to be well taken. For, even to the present day, women

¹Max Lerner, America as a Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), II, 603.

²Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 425.

have been rebelling: searching for some meaning to their "equality" or even more significantly, "wondering" about the efficacy of their successes.

To be sure, in the plethora of books being published on women, we, as humanity, are constantly criticized, shamed, urged, and even humiliated into elevating the position of the American woman.³ The desired panacea--the nineteenth amendment--was not. As psychological symbol, it was a boon;⁴ as actual fact, only another beginning. A reform--officially begun in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, as the movement for woman's rights, filtered through prisons, slavery, temperance, dress, insane asylums, and later

³Many books, concerned with the "double standard" of morality or sexuality, are encouraged by new methods of birth control. Others exhort women to use their means of higher education to achieve an equal status. See, e.g., Beverly Benner Cassara (ed.), American Women: The Changing Image (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962); and, Dorothy Goldberg, The Creative Woman (Washington, D. C.: Robert B. Luce, Inc., 1963). Still others suggest a mere resort to "humanity" as a final impetus. See, e.g., Viola Klein, The Feminine Character, History of an Ideology (New York: International Universities Press, 1949). Compositely considered, these and other books underlie the ambiguous position of the American woman and the curious proposals--as reforms--to solve the problem.

⁴Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), and others make much of this "symbolism." The argument stated that the vote would make a great difference, but in actuality, it did not.

construed as a struggle for suffrage--was not victorious in the symbolic ballot. The reforming continued. Inherent is a facet of the American Character. Consider the components.

The idea of change, regardless of terminology: reform, social movement, revolution, has always been a part of the American experience. A continual search for the better, emphasized by individualism, progress, immigration, the lack of tradition, and other things, has been one sure constant in the development of an American civilization.⁵ As mentioned, the woman has been a vital part of this reforming spirit: a constant within a constant. Also, her share in an American character has been curiously neglected by scholars. It is hoped that this dissertation will be a partial solution to this problem: a beginning to a study of the character of American woman and an addition to the growing literature searching for the American character.

Several factors will be considered in an effort

⁵This is Max Lerner's term and a good one. Our overriding purpose is to discover an American character for women, and as seen by Lerner, this search for a character is a small but important thread in the understanding of the whole tapestry of America.

to effect a composite portrait. Reform will serve as the basis. The historical pulse of such social movements involved the woman early in the nineteenth century: compatibility was immediate; her American character was begun. Moreover, the feminist used a definite approach, an ideology to define her needs and goals. This "mind" of the woman reformer, seminal in importance, developed into a vital rationale and constituent in the woman's character. Together with reform, these "ideas" provide a sound basis to the American woman's character. Also important are the social aspects or "fringes" of the woman's rights movement. Fashion or dress emerge here first as symbols of woman's "oppression." An analysis of the changing trends and the reasons behind them provides an interesting and penetrating look into the feminine character. Furthermore, the argument in the "folk" songs used by the women, and their characterization in cartoons and drama provide interesting commentary and add to the formation of their American character.⁶

⁶Historians argue from different viewpoints as to the components of an American character. There are those who employ folksongs, folklore, clothes, etc., as social history commentary on a civilization. These parts of analyses, searching for a woman's character, are presented here as valid, since they were used for other discussions, but never pertaining to women in America.

-Considering all, in a less than complete picture, a beginning is made on the character of American women. To be sure, it is only a facet of the whole American character, but necessary for at "least half the nation."⁷

⁷This "half the nation" argument was used many times both by the women, and retrospectively.

CHAPTER II

THE WOMAN AND REFORM

Reform is an elusive term. Definitions effect ambiguity; descriptions, redundancy. One can produce examples and explain the mechanics of many "social movements"; the reason behind them can be understood and elaborated; the historical pulse can even be felt as compatible. Yet no definition is immediately valid. Synonyms often provide partial solutions: and, contextually speaking, change is the answer to a meaning of reform. For better or for worse, the organized reform or the individual reformer hold change as the law of human society. It underscores and emphasizes all motives, antagonistic or congruent, and provides the constant unity for all participants.

Similarly, the position of the American woman in the pre-Civil War reform stirrings was not clearly understood or defined. "Degradation," "oppression," "keep woman in her sphere," were phrases continually emphasized and fought by the mid-nineteenth century

American woman. Consciously or unconsciously, the gains made by the earlier feminists in labor, property legislation, professional fields, westward movement, and the image of the genteel female, were ignored by the organized women reformers of 1848.¹

The sway of reform was too potent to be resisted. Nothing was sacrosanct, so the woman hastened to re-make the sluggish elements of her society. The initiative was present; the momentum begun. The woman as reformer could not be avoided. She became a distinct personification of Emerson's famous dictum: "What is a man born for but to be a Reformer, a Re-maker of what man has made; a renouncer of lies, a restorer of truth and good."² This renouncing by the woman reformers of the opposition against their "equality," and the restoring of "truth" was compatible with

¹Many authors consider the position of the American woman in Colonial and Revolutionary times. Eugenie Andruss Leonard et al., The American Woman in Colonial and Revolutionary Times (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1962) and Keith Eugene Melder, "The Beginnings of the Women's Rights Movement in the United States, 1800-1840" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Yale University, 1963) are two very good discussions, especially the latter.

²Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Man the Reformer," A Lecture Read before the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association, Boston, January 25, 1841, Nature (A. L. Burt Company, Publishers, n.d.), p. 232.

the whole historical pulse of reform. A discussion of the rationale will indicate this position.

Of the several influences which shaped the thinking behind reforms, one of the most important was the Enlightenment in America. In all of the constituent theories, it served as an early outline to the whole idea of reform. Instead of a medieval society, presenting man and itself as static, and wholly unpleasant, the Enlightenment saw man as the central figure controlling his own destiny, and tempered by the one goal of human happiness. With the emphasis on human reason serving as the fountainhead, certain truths followed: progress was inevitable; equality was inherent; and social improvement was desirable. Reform was synonymous with all these beliefs.

Moreover, a theory for the Revolution developed in this Enlightenment argument. Combining the natural rights of John Locke and the social contract ideas of Rousseau, the prime immunities of John Wise and the argument of Jonathan Mayhew emphasizing the right of revolution, the reform ideology crystallized in Thomas Paine: original equality is the birthright of every man. Reformers, especially, employed this axiom and embraced the movement which "provided the sharpest

challenge for the future."³

Women were significantly affected by the repercussions of the Enlightenment argument. Every idea could, of course, be applied to them and used as a basis of reform. Yet beyond the immediate consequences, the Enlightenment "brought a quickening of the drive for better educational facilities and techniques, and it produced an enormous literature devoted to human betterment."⁴ Indeed, the spur to education was very important, for when the feminists began, it became the obvious starting point to dispel the universal belief that "woman's brain was smaller in capacity, and therefore, inferior in quality to that of a man."⁵ Thus a foundation to reform was laid in this Enlightenment argument. Other influences served to make the ideology only more irresistible and appealing to the American woman.

The Declaration of Independence, a product of

³Rod W. Horton and Herbert W. Edwards, Backgrounds of American Literary Thought (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1952), p. 74.

⁴Melder, op. cit., p. 57.

⁵Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle, The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 23.

Enlightenment thinking, supplied a set of ideals to reform arguments. Indeed, its very form epitomized a reform ideology.⁶ To be sure, the women's rights movement became organized in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York, on a paraphrase of the Declaration of Independence. "Man" was substituted for King George, and eighteen grievances were listed as the basis for a needed reform. The result was a Declaration of Principles.⁶

Another impetus to reform was the spirit of revivalism or evangelism which had arisen in two "Great Awakenings" prior to the Civil War. Here the result could be achieved by man, alone. He was capable of regeneration, conversion, and thus perfectible. An important feeling of optimism developed which underlay all attempts at change. Women especially benefitted: if man was perfectible (changed to the woman's position), soon the products of men, ideas and institutions, would be changed (presumably in favor of women).

⁶Arthur Mann, Yankee Reformers in the Urban Age (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1954), and Arthur M. Schlesinger, The American as Reformer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), are two of the many books which discuss the Declaration of Independence as basis for reform.

Romanticism, the undefinable term, was, also, an influence to reform in pre-Civil War America. Affirmatively speaking, the romantic movement emphasized imagination, nature, the individual, spontaneous human feelings, optimism, and natural man: disregarding education, birth, wealth. Applied to women, "Romanticism put very strong emphasis upon [their] moral role, offering positive duties . . . which were meaningful, respectable, and morally acceptable."⁷ A chance for reform was thus opened up to the American woman based on this Europe-oriented Romanticism. "In this New World, . . . this "natural man" [woman] might at last come into his own."⁸

If no other pressures had been exerted to effect reform, the invitation to women from the Romantic ideal would have been sufficient. Emphasizing and underscoring the Enlightenment appeal and the push from evangelism, it made reform even more irresistible. Yet other influences prevailed.

Transcendentalism, an expression of romanticism, exalted the individual, declared a divinity in man,

⁷Melder, op. cit., p. 41.

⁸Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (3d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 362.

and above all, advocated the equality of each man and woman. "In the transcendental definition, true reform proceeded from the individual and worked outward through the family, the neighborhood, and ultimately into the social and political life of the community."⁹ The American woman, although not a transcendentalist, used the pattern.

Utilitarianism, with the well-worn Benthamism "the greatest good of the greatest number"; humanitarianism, and its philanthropic connotations;¹⁰ and idealism, as philosophy to the common man and expressed in the phrase "what-ought-to-be," all gave added weight to a reform mentality. Furthermore, a country as new as the United States did not conservatively restrain zealous reformers. A status quo need not be retained; experimentation was possible and desirable. In other words, there was no burdensome "weight of tradition"¹¹

⁹John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," American Quarterly, XVII, No. 4 (Winter, 1965), 671.

¹⁰Merle Curti, "American Philanthropy and the National Character," American Quarterly, X (Winter, 1958), 420-37. The various definitions of philanthropy and the applications are well presented in this article; a connection with reform is understood.

¹¹Schlesinger, op. cit., p. 6.

to impede a reform movement. This was true not only because a past was lacking, but also, due to the flood of immigrants who came to America in pre-Civil War days. Their coming, at least, implied a hope for change, an optimism, and a feeling of individualism.

Moreover, the historical temper centered in a feeling of Jacksonian grass-roots democracy, with the common man as object; the abundance of land and rugged individualism, hallmarks of the Westward expansion; and the manifest feeling which the American people experienced to make the world over in a universal "reform"--combined to advance further the movement of reform.

This concentrated surge of reform, rooted in the Enlightenment, and Circe-like in quality, included all in its sweep. Margaret Fuller's, The Dial, was not exaggerating when it declared in 1841: "The triumph of reform is sounding through the world for a revolution of all human affairs."¹² And the American woman was a willing participant. Through such turbulent changes of society, she saw a chance to improve her all too slowly changing position. Indeed, her

¹²Gilbert Vivian Seldes, The Stammering Century (New York: John Day, 1928), p. 201.

direct channel came through the most humanitarian and largest of reforms: abolitionism.¹³ For the slave served as an example to woman: she saw her own position in the Negro, and in the view, an opportunity to elevate it. A consideration of the pattern of reform, as seen both by the woman, and retrospectively, will shed further light on our discussion. Perhaps a new glimpse of a "character" will emerge.

In an essay "Reforms and Reformers," Horace Greeley once wrote: "The true reformer turns his eyes first inward, scrutinizing himself, his habits, purposes, efforts, enjoyments, asking, What signifies this? and this? and wherein is its justification?"¹⁴ The woman used this self-reflective method most often and usually answered all questions the same way: man. For, initially, the women's targets became the dictates of religion and the Common Law: both considered oppressive, often exaggerated, and together equalling women's "dull" society. Moreover, men devised the

¹³Melder, op. cit., presents the best, single discussion of the woman and slavery in pre-Civil War America; see, e.g., his chapter on, "The Woman Question and Anti-Slavery."

¹⁴Henry Steele Commager (ed.), The Era of Reform, 1830-1860, Reading No. 5 (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1960), p. 29.

Common Law and served as the ministers in churches. Each group, conversely and negatively, were direct catalysts to the rise of the feminist movement. Let us consider each briefly.

Since the churches were such potent forces in early American history, their teachings would undoubtedly be heeded, and almost all of them held the same views about the inferiority of the American woman. The original sin of Eve was considered the underlying cause of women's limitations. She could not compete with men, and consequently, be equal with them because, in punishment for Eve's sin, woman had an inferior mind, a weaker body, and altogether a lesser position. Yet for her primary and "proper role of motherhood, the Almighty had taken especial pains to endow her with such virtues as modesty, meekness, compassion, affability, and piety."¹⁵ In American society it was considered one of the "greatest glories, to instil in children pure Christian faith and morals,"¹⁶ and woman was given this job. Moreover, the lessons of St. Paul were frequently used as religious texts relegating

¹⁵Flexner, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁶Robert E. Riegel, American Feminists (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1963), p. 5.

woman to an inferior position.¹⁷ It is relatively easy, in such arguments, to perceive immediately the consequences: the important Church was speaking, and people listened.

The Common Law as 'interpreted' by Blackstone in his Commentaries served as a second target for the feminists. For, although Mary Beard, by considering Joseph Story's Equity Jurisprudence as Administered in England and America, as a supplantation to the Commentaries of Blackstone, has argued convincingly that the civil death of women was a "fantastic myth,"¹⁸ certain important factors were neglected. Exposition to this common law effected a keen awareness among the people who did, indeed, use it. Women were especially sensitive, albeit, sometimes in an exaggerated way--but, again, the AWARENESS was there. Moreover, important people like Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of the Rights of Women) reinforced the Common Law through

¹⁷Several American feminists, in their letters, diaries, and journals, ardently discuss the position of St. Paul in regard to women's inferiority. Much secondary source material is also devoted to St. Paul's dictums, see, e.g., Arthur M. Schlesinger, New Viewpoints in American History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), Chapter VI: "The Role of Women in American History."

¹⁸Mary Beard, Woman as Force in History (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 144.

their writings. All combined to produce a sufficient argument and instigation to reform. Consider some of these common laws which were especially pertinent to married women. For unmarried women were not as strictly legally bound although they had no real social place and were probably condemned to a life of economic dependence in the homes of married relatives. Widows, too, had a separate legal position. In 1860, David Dudley Field, a jurist summarized these important legal restrictions.

A married woman can not sue for her services, as all she earns legally belongs to the husband, whereas his earnings belong to himself, and the wife legally has no interest in them. Where children have property and both parents are living, the father is the guardian. In case of the wife's death without a will, the husband is entitled to all her personal property and to a life interest in the whole of her real estate to the entire exclusion of the children, even though this property may have come to her through a former husband and the children of that marriage still be living. If the husband die without a will, the widow is entitled to one-third of the personal property and to a life interest in one-third only of the real estate. In case a wife be personally injured, either in reputation by slander, or in body by accident, compensation must be recovered in the joint name of herself and her husband, and when recovered it belongs to him. . . . The father may by deed or will appoint a guardian for the minor children, who may thus be taken entirely away from the jurisdiction of the mother at his death.¹⁹

¹⁹Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony (Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Co., 1899), I, 185-86.

Alice Tyler continued the summary:

Her lack of separate legal identity was recognized in laws that held her husband solely responsible for offenses and crimes she might commit in his presence or with his consent. But the value of this recognition is doubtful, for wife beating with a reasonable instrument was legal in almost every state as late as 1850. In Massachusetts, Judge Buller defined the legal instrument as a stick no thicker than his thumb, and in New York, the courts upheld a worthy Methodist exhorter who beat his wife with a horse-whip every few weeks in order to keep her in proper subjection and prevent her scolding.²⁰

This is particularly shocking when one considers that woman, also, had almost no right of divorce.²¹

Thus, into this legal and ecclesiastical milieu the woman reformer appeared. Urged on by the combined influences to reform she was even more encouraged by an AWARENESS--a cognizance of the fact that a personal reform was needed. This is an important first step to a successful social movement as Elizabeth Cady Stanton later wrote in her diary:

If I were to draw up a set of rules for the guidance of reformers, such as Franklin and other celebrities tell us they did for their own use, I should put at the head of the list: Do all you

²⁰Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), p. 426.

²¹Leonard et al., op. cit., p. 37.

can, NO MATTER WHAT, to get people to think on your reform, and then, if the reform is good, it will come about in due season.²²

Yet her task was even harder than the inference of the laws, for not only had the "vast majority of women felt no desire to protest their limitations,"²³ but the American feminist had to identify first with other humanitarian reforms to insure success in her own rights movements.

The obvious starting point was education. Through the efforts of Hannah Mather Crocker, Emma Willard, Mary Lyon, Catharine Beecher, and others, proof was shown that woman could learn with her "small brain." This evidence led to another important basis of reform: organization. Mastering this knack could insure success, but the beginnings were humble. Earliest rudimentary organizations were founded to raise money for several kinds of charities from consoling prisoners and reforming prostitutes to serving foreign missions. Crusades, other than charities, were "almost

²²Theodore Stanton and Harriet Stanton Blatch (eds.), Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1922), II, 252. Diary entry: Cleveland, August 20, 1888.

²³Riegel, op. cit., p. 6.

infinite in variety, with such aims as eliminating the use of tobacco, obtaining proper observance of the Sabbath, encouraging proper dress, suppressing undesirable books, plays, and statues."²⁴ The nineteenth century woman, with her innate virtues, was considered ideally suited for these various organizations. Yet, aided by her awareness in an expanding education, the American woman foresaw no permanent pervading results in these sewing-circle-bazaar-type societies. Only when the most humanitarian of reforms, abolitionism, became dominant, did the woman reformer consider her societies childish and desire an equal position as a reformer. For, many anti-slavery groups were developing in several states and cities which the women, consciously, recognized as very important, and, unconsciously, an opportunity for advancement of their own rights.

Encouraged by such men as William Lloyd Garrison, and Theodore Weld, women were invited to attend several anti-slavery meetings. Thus, by participating they aroused added public disfavor with their abolitionist sentiments and their questioning of woman's

²⁴Ibid., p. 17.

traditional status. Adamant and fearless, however, they continued the struggle by organizing their own clubs which in 1837 developed into the National Female Anti-Slavery Society. This was an important beginning to a reform based on women's rights exclusively, but several obstacles had to be overcome before women would recognize this fully.

The first was the prejudice against women on a public podium, and the Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina, were the most instrumental women reformers in this area. Born in South Carolina, they unexpectedly, but vehemently opposed slavery. Speaking so effectively to several women's abolition societies in the North, the sisters were invited to address many men's organizations and even mixed audiences. The result was an enormous controversy, spearheaded by the conservative church, and followed by the demonstrations of the crude and the ignorant. The Grimkes were forced to abandon their abolitionist feelings, but only briefly, to consider a more basic reform: women's rights.

And I think we could convince you that we cannot push Abolitionism forward with all our might until we take up the stumbling block out of the road. . . . You may depend upon it, tho'

to meet this question may appear to be turning out of our road, that it is not. IT IS NOT: we must meet it, and meet it now and meet it like women in the fear of the Lord. . . . If we surrender the right to speak to the public this year, we must surrender the right to petition next year and the right to WRITE the year after and so on. What THEN can WOMAN do for the slave when she is herself under the feet of man and shamed into silence?²⁵

The appearance of the Grimkes was incrementally important: successfully, they aided the anti-slavery movement; more successfully, they destroyed much of the prejudice against women speakers; most successfully, they recognized the urgent need for reforms for women's rights.

Yet, the feminists, with a somewhat hesitant realization, refused complete protestation, until a seeming saturation point was reached. In education, professions, and even temperance crusades, women were continually ignored--but they remained silent. In 1840, however, the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London was the last important defeat, and the direct catalyst to equality. "The women were excluded by an

²⁵Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (eds.), Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1934), pp. 429-30. Letter from Angelina Grimke to Weld and John Greenleaf Whittier, Brookline, Massachusetts, August 20, 1837.

overwhelming majority--only to receive the added insult of being asked to attend the meetings in a curtained enclosure and to have no unpleasant feelings over the outcome."²⁶ Two determined women, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were in attendance. The insult was sufficient to inspire leadership. Returning home, they employed all the organs of propaganda: newspapers, letters, speeches, meetings, pamphlets--compositely, just short of national scope. The solution, the "1776" for women, came in 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York. On July 14, the following announcement appeared in the Seneca Falls County

Courier:

WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION.--A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, N. Y., on Wednesday and Thursday, July 19, 20, current, commencing at ten o'clock A.M. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention.²⁷

²⁶Tyler, op. cit., p. 447.

²⁷William D. P. Bliss (ed.), The New Encyclopedia of Social Reform (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1908), p. 1302.

At this convention, "the first protest publicly made by women against their social and political subjection,"²⁸ was drafted.

Thus an awareness and organization were understood before the Civil War. The means to achieve a victory, however, were not readily understood. With such a movement envisioned by certain women, the solution could, obviously, not be achieved in a day, a year, or even a decade. Time would be needed, and in the ensuing years, attitudes about reforms changed and developed. These are not to be confused with an ideology which will be discussed later, but are various poses assumed by women to continue their reform or even begin it in an advantageous way.

The first group of positions may be termed "masculine." Abby Kelley initiated this trend with her personal argument: "Whatever ways and means are right for men to adopt in reforming the world, are right also for women to adopt in pursuing the same object."²⁹ Some women definitely agreed and advocated

²⁸Frances M. Bjorkman (ed.), The Blue Book of Woman Suffrage: History, Arguments, and Results (New York: National Woman Suffrage Publishing Co., Inc., 1917), p. 6.

²⁹Melder, op. cit., p. 335.

the perennial masculine traits of "violence" to achieve an end. Susan B. Anthony inferred this sentiment in these deceptively mild words:

Cautious, careful people, always casting about to preserve their reputation and social standing, never can bring about a reform. Those who are really in earnest must be willing to be anything or nothing in the world's estimation, and publicly and privately, in season and out, avow their sympathy with despised and persecuted ideas and their advocates, and bear the consequences.³⁰

But Lucy Stone left nothing to the imagination: "If one thousand women, or even one hundred, could be induced to complain, to resist, and call all the world to see how unjustly women are dealt with, it would do a world of good";³¹ nor did Lucretia Mott: "Give me noise on this subject; [women's cause] a real Boanerges."³² And Elizabeth Cady Stanton felt that the alternative was clear: ". . . the movement would never come to anything until the women were mad enough

³⁰Alma Lutz, Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humanitarian (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 83.

³¹Letter from Lucy Stone to Miss Muller, Boston, August 23, 1885. In the Alma Lutz Collection at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Folder No. 15.

³²Excerpt from a letter of Lucretia Mott, October 16, 1858. In the Women's Rights Collection at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Folder 650.

to swear,"³³ and, ". . . I think if women would indulge more freely in vituperation, they would enjoy ten times the health they do."³⁴ Yet no woman reformer could compete in violent principles (nor many men) with Carry Nation, the masculine feminist par excellence. Labelling her own brand of reform, "hatchetation,"³⁵ she admitted in her autobiography: "I never saw anything that needed rebuke, exhortation or warning but that I felt it was my duty to meddle with it."³⁶ To be sure, meddle is a mild term!

Some women, however, hoped to use their feminine "virtues" in pushing a reform. Since they were different from men, the argument stated, why not emphasize the difference in achieving a similar status? Lillie Devereux Blake, who always felt "caged beyond

³³Stanton and Blatch (eds.), op. cit., II, 128. Letter to Elizabeth Smith Miller, Tenafly, New Jersey, August 10, 1870.

³⁴Stanton and Blatch (eds.), op. cit., II, 73. Letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Seneca Falls, New York, May 1, 1859.

³⁵Ishbel Ross, Charmers and Cranks, Twelve Famous American Women Who Defied Conventions (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 182.

³⁶Ibid., p. 174.

endurance,"³⁷ was the greatest exponent of this view.

I was not more than sixteen when I first realized the position of my sex, feeling even then with bitter indignation the inferiority of the position assigned to women, and I have now a singular paper which I drew up in 1849, which curiously illustrated my sentiments even at that early age. In this document I adopted as my motto these words: "I live to redress the wrongs of my sex" and I find below it a statement which runs thus:

"Women have been from time immemorial duped and deserted by men, their feelings trifled with, their hearts broken! This shameful injustice I have determined to redress. I will devote to it youth, beauty, life; I will forget myself and my own feelings in avenging on men their faithlessness. For this their hearts must be interested and then trifled with, therefore, I give myself heart and soul to making men miserable. If they love me, I will refuse them, no matter how much I may be interested. I will live but to redress these terrible wrongs."³⁸

To her, "beauty and fascination"³⁹ became "woman's inalienable weapons."⁴⁰

Other arguments were seen in various ideas of truth, justice, and law. Susan B. Anthony defined the objective: "Ours is a work to establish truth and

³⁷Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Journals, 1859-1908. The entry in the diary is dated: September 3, 1876.

³⁸Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Autobiography: Chapter VI, "Young Lady Life, 1850-1855," p. 2.

³⁹Ibid., Chapter XXXI, p. 6.

⁴⁰Ibid.

justice--and I want every plank of the walk thereto to be laid in the solid rock."⁴¹ In the same vein, Lucy Stone never defined the right or truth but employed the terminology nevertheless: "Be true to yourself. . . . Whoever is on the right side, will be sure, at last, to succeed, for one with God, is a Majority."⁴²

The sentiment by Margaret Fuller, the conceited, transcendentalist editor of The Dial, was echoed in her definition of a reformer:

Those who would reform the world must show that they do not speak in the heat of wild impulse; their lives must be unstained by passionate error; they must be severe lawgivers to themselves. They must be religious students of the divine purpose with regard to man, if they would not confound the fancies of the day with the requisitions of eternal good. Their liberty must be the liberty of law and knowledge.⁴³

And Antoinette Brown Blackwell combined the masculine and feminine attitudes with the notion of truth: "But

⁴¹Letter from Susan B. Anthony to "Friend Wood," New York, August 23, 1867. In the Archives at the Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.

⁴²Letter from Lucy Stone to Mr. Samuel May, New York City, May 16, 1853. Located in the Alma Lutz Collection at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Folder No. 11.

⁴³Mason Wade, Margaret Fuller, Whetstone of Genius (New York: The Viking Press, 1940), p. 134.

I believe there is soon to be a new era in woman's history and the means to effect this must be truth wielded in firmness, gentleness, and forbearance."⁴⁴

A final position to a "means" of reform can be called a vision or "one goal" posture. Theodore Weld first urged the Grimke sisters in this method:

Surely it is almost plain enough to be called self evident, that the only common sense method of conducting a great moral enterprise is to start with a FUNDAMENTAL PLAIN PRINCIPLE, so fundamental as to involve wide relations and so plain that it cannot be denied; . . . Now what is plainer than that the grand primitive principle for which we struggle is HUMAN rights, and that the rights of woman is a principle purely derivative from the other? Human rights, HUMAN rights--analyze, sift, explain, trace, enforce; show their origin, responsibilities, sacredness; perforate the indurated mind of the church all over with them, and you have done nine-tenths of the work necessary to bring over the community to woman's rights.⁴⁵

Later on, Anna Howard Shaw reiterated the attitude in a retrospective speech on reforms and reformers:

"Herein, lies the secret of the success of the reformer. First the vision, then the purpose of the vision. 'I

⁴⁴Letter from Antoinette Brown Blackwell to Lucy Stone, Rochester, Minnesota, 1847. Located in the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, A-77.

⁴⁵Barnes and Dumond (eds.), op. cit., I, 434-36.

was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."⁴⁶ She appended a stirring conclusion urging the woman never to yield in the face of "the dungeon, the fagot, or the cross."⁴⁷ Having the vision, she could endure all. Thus, a new guise was added to reform movements: a principle of woman acting as victim. After all, were not the attitudes of masculinity, femininity, truth, the one vision, et al., merely paraphrases of martyrdom? For, in a lesser sense, the woman felt she was suffering and eventually based her movement for rights on this symbol of perennial scapegoat. The ideology built from such temporal sainthood became indelible in the American woman's self-image.

A final method of viewing women and reform is in the social psychology of such a movement. Hans Toch, in his book, The Social Psychology of Social Movements, presents a scheme showing the manner in

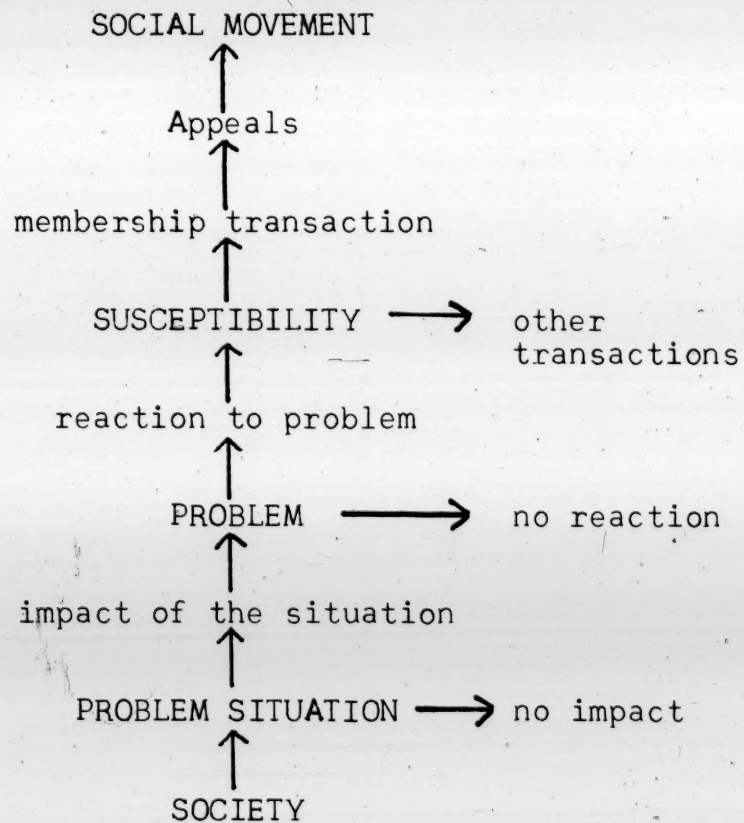
⁴⁶Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper (eds.), The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. IV: 1883-1900 (Rochester, N. Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1902), p. 131.

⁴⁷Ibid.

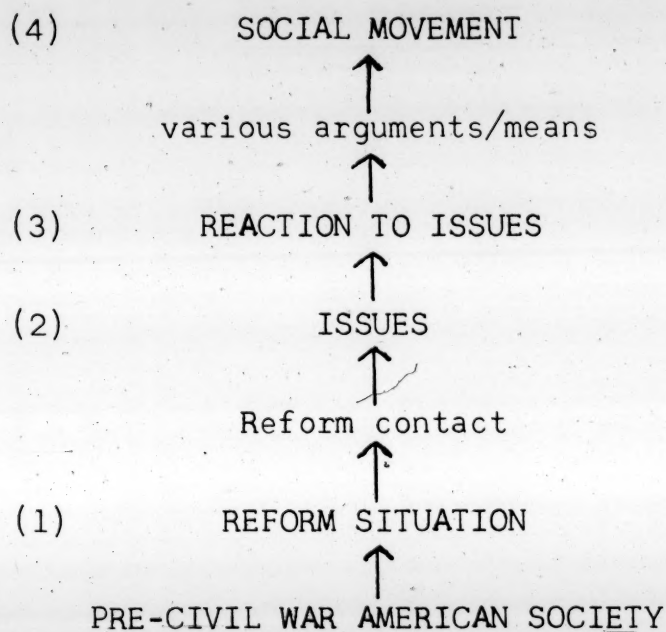
which beliefs are adapted.⁴⁸ By using a similar pattern, one can more easily follow the woman's rights movement from the pre-Civil War days.

The scheme is basically one of four steps, from the situation to the movement.

⁴⁸In the work by Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), p. 27, the following pattern is used:



His terminology is not entirely suitable to our purposes.



The first step is an awareness of a reform situation, a milieu in which reform could take place. For the woman, as mentioned, this occurred before 1865 and involved her inferior position: the reform: to elevate her status. This problem "touched" certain people who were concerned with forwarding the movement. Seneca Falls was the second step: issues were raised, discussed, and often changed in succeeding years. These, of course, gave rise to reactions which positively added recruits to the whole movement, but, negatively, splintered into quarrels over methods. The various components or means, considered best to achieve an end, were variously divided between dress reform, labor legislation, temperance, suffrage, and

others. Voting became the ultimate symbol until the twentieth century. At its gain, however, the means changed to identity, for methods were still evolving. A social movement (Step 4) of long duration developed and is still unfolding: means changed but the reform situation remained constant.

Thus, considering all: the components of reform, the woman's attitudes, and the pattern of their social movement, the compatibility is apparent. Always searching and questioning and employing new objectives to find her "place," the woman, in Schlesinger's words, becomes the perennial "disturber of the peace [committing] assault and battery on human complacency."⁴⁹ A definition of reform is still elusive, but a synonym is added: the American woman. A first important part of a character is revealed.

⁴⁹Schlesinger, The American as Reformer, p. 66.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN REFORMER: HER IDEOLOGY

To discuss the ideology of a social movement as encompassing as women's rights, is very difficult. Two problems are immediately apparent: (1) by its very definition, an ideology is a "cafeteria of appeals"¹; one thread is hard to isolate; (2) the women's rights movement was not based on one approach--several were tried and most failed. To be sure, both issues centered around elevating woman's position in society, as basic, but the arguments to achieve the end became confused. An attempt will be made to categorize the ideas employed² keeping in mind the following definition:

¹Hans Toch, The Social Psychology of Social Movements (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965), p. 17.

²Other books have attempted to do this, but only for limited periods. Aileen Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), is the best. "Justice" and "expediency" were her primary categories.

Ideologies may be formalized in some sort of platform; they may be scattered in speeches and in literature, or they may have to be inferred. However recorded, the ideology of a social movement defines the movement, and contrasts it with other movements and institutions. It also furnishes an objective description of solutions offered by the movement for the problems of its members.³

Indeed, the woman's ideology was "scattered" in so many places under every conceivable guise, that a complete compilation is impossible. Everything from fables to pamphlets, from banners to diaries, exhibits some one argument. A pattern in all is not possible. Our purpose, however, is to discover an American character in an ideology; and this can be done.

Basically, the woman's argument can be construed as one of contradictions or opposites, especially in three areas: (1) uniqueness (femininity) vs. "sameness" (masculinity); (2) right/justice vs. duty; and (3) Patriotic and Pious Perennials vs. Inevitable Absurdities. Each can be discussed in various subdivisions, and by so doing, perhaps another part of the woman's character will be put in place.

Despite discussions concerning biological or physical distinctions, the differences between men and

³Toch, op. cit., p. 21.

women were often overlooked in the mechanics of reform. The end was the desirable, and oftentimes the only consideration. One line of argument sought to remedy this by emphasizing woman's uniqueness: proving that woman, because of her sex, and even in spite of her sex, could decidedly add "something" to effect a better world. "It was maintained that women . . . were possessed of qualities which were not sufficiently represented in public life; that they would add a new facet to it and thereby make it not only more complete, but all the richer and happier."⁴

This argument was, of course, used in several reforms, and eventually objectified in the ballot. Yet, here also, the success was not complete: the ideas and the appearances were incongruous. Uniqueness as femininity, verbally expressed as "near to angels,"⁵ became formalized, and exaggerated, and eventually backfired. It was one thing to ideologize a difference; another, to actualize it.

Frances Willard, the leader, organizer, and

⁴Viola Klein, "The Stereotype of Femininity," Journal of Social Issues, VI, No. 3 (1950), 5.

⁵Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Women and the Alphabet (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1881), p. 306.

force behind the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) in the years after the Civil War, was a great exponent of the uniqueness argument. Her initially important idea was womanliness first, which she succeeded in instilling in her members. Couched in the slogan of "home protection,"⁶ her whole campaign was a psychological masterpiece. What woman does not want to protect her home? to safeguard her family? to make all more homelike? By working through the temperance reform, and eventually through struggles in suffrage, this could be achieved because woman would be exhibiting her uniqueness. Later on, this "Willard homliness" was to be included in a Do-Everything policy stretching from help for lumberjacks and prisoners to working in peace arbitrations--yet all done by women in the W.C.T.U. The complete idea was for women to show their abilities in several areas under the direction of an organization formed by women, run by women, and for the elevation of women--exclusively. Implied, at least, was the hope of showing the "blessed sons of Adam that when woman comes to be an equal

⁶The whole idea is well discussed in Mary Earhart, Frances Willard, From Prayers to Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

factor in civilization, the solar system will still move round obedient to law, and that man will still have a place on this planet."⁷ Yet, to most, a woman showing her femininity outside of the home was self-contradictory. In the temperance reform it especially failed.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in her famous speech, "The Solitude of Self," also worked this idea of femininity, under the expression of "individualism," into her argument. Her discussion centered around a four-fold division on the rights of woman: (1) as individual; (2) as citizen; (3) as a woman; and (4) as mother which Mrs. Stanton called "incidental relations of life."⁸ Inherent in all these poses is the reason why a woman should have all the opportunities for self-fulfillment: "the solitude and personal responsibility of her own individual life."⁹ In the first

⁷Theodore Stanton and Harriet Stanton Blatch (eds.), Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1922), II, 145. Letter to Anna E. Dickinson, Tenafly, New Jersey, August 20, 1873.

⁸Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper (eds.), The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. IV: 1883-1900 (Rochester, N. Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1902), p. 189.

⁹Ibid.

and second categories, woman is equal to man, or vice versa. The uniqueness appears in the third division: a "woman" different from man, but her rights of "individual happiness and development" are the same.

When Stanton arrives at her fourth role, woman is all alone: no man could engage in this part which involves the special duties and training of woman's sphere. Thus, it is in this final role, incrementally presented, where woman can produce many different results for a better civilization. She can use her femininity both to claim her rights and to effect a better security. As Stanton reiterates: the woman "must rely on herself"¹⁰ to achieve a change for the better in her situation.

Paradoxically, this same argument from uniqueness (femininity) was employed by the "antis," in a primary emphasis on the home. Indeed, "it was the link of the woman to the home that underlay their entire ideology."¹¹ These antagonistic factions are primary reasons why the ideology was not completely successful for the feminists, and also, provided an

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Kraditor, op. cit., p. 15.

impetus to the rise of other arguments.

Opposed to the argument from uniqueness is the one which can conveniently be labelled "sameness" or masculinity. Two important parts constituted this section of the ideology: (1) male dominance, and (2) feminism. Let us briefly consider them.

Strictly speaking, feminism and male dominance are two ways of expressing the same idea. For, behind the reasoning of the women who adhered to this approach was always some masculine connotation, either in "man" or "husband," or "oppression," and "second sex." For some this reasoning even developed into a philosophy, which often amounted to "outright antagonism."¹²

Elizabeth Cady Stanton continually implied this female frustration in her letters and diaries. In deceptively comic words, she often showed a bitterness:

The custom of calling women Mrs. John This and Mrs. Tom That, and colored men, Sambo and Zip Coon, is founded on the principle that white men are the lords of all. I cannot acknowledge

¹²Christopher Lasch, The New Radicalism in America, The Intellectual as a Social Type (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 57.

this principle as just; therefore, I cannot bear the name of another.¹³

The male is definitely construed as dominant and considered both as object of envy and attack. Later on Mrs. Stanton was to leave no interpretations or connotations open in the face of victory: "I have come to the conclusion that the first great work to be accomplished for woman is to revolutionize the dogma that sex is a crime, marriage a defilement, and maternity a bane."¹⁴ Notice that the objects of her "revolution" are women-centered, and male dominated. Except for "maternity," a sameness is inferred, and because of it woman can manage, in society, a status equal with man's.

In a later speech, Carrie Chapman Catt rephrased the argument from sameness, in a more eloquent and forceful manner:

Four chief causes led to the subjection of women, each the logical deduction from the theory that men were the units of the race--obedience, ignorance, the denial of personal liberty, and the denial of right to property

¹³Stanton and Blatch (eds.), op. cit., II, 16. Letter to Rebecca R. Eyster, Seneca Falls, New York, May 1, 1847.

¹⁴Stanton and Blatch (eds.), op. cit., II, 209. Diary entry: Tenafly, New Jersey, February 22, 1881.

and wages. These forces united in cultivating a spirit of egotism and tyranny in men and weak dependence in women. The details of their enforcement have filled the pages of history with records of cruelty and tragedy, which form the saddest commentary upon the ignorance and superstition of past centuries. . . . We must educate and agitate, agitate and educate until a full understanding of the race responsibility of motherhood shall have reached the remotest man and woman. . . . The whole aim of the woman movement has been to destroy the idea that obedience is necessary to woman; to train women to such self-respect that they would not grant obedience and to train men to such comprehension of equity they would not exact it.¹⁵

Nothing was left to suggestion for the desired approach. Woman was alike with man in equality, self-respect, and personal liberty. This was the argument from "sameness," used by some women but opposed by "masculine vanity."¹⁶ Both failed eventually, but only after feminism was revived in the 1920's. When the ballot proved unsuccessful as a cure-all, new feminists appeared who curiously advocated old ideas.

¹⁵From the President's Annual Address delivered by Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt before the 34th Annual Convention of the National-American Woman Suffrage Association and the First International Woman Suffrage Conference held in Washington, D. C., February 12-18, 1902. In the Susan B. Anthony Collection at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Folder 30.

¹⁶Margaret C. Moss's phrase, used in a speech delivered in Detroit, Michigan, May 19, 1938. In the Caroline Babcock Collection at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.



The only difference was the object: "identity" replaced the ballot. Among several commentators on the subject, Ida Clarke presents a good description:

There are two tenets in modern feministic philosophy. The first is that woman is not a "human second," that hers is not an "auxiliary sex," nor is woman in any way congenitally inferior to man. The second is that there is no subject or issue that can conceivably come within the scope of national and international deliberation that is not equally the concern of women and men, and that national and international councils that do not include women on an equal footing with men are not truly representative of groups or nations.¹⁷

The "modern" argument is familiar and not really different. A slightly new approach can be found in the authority of the language employed. Women, personally or psychologically, felt a "sameness" with man, but, of course, with a different object; it was merely a new beginning to a middle-aged reform.¹⁸

Another set of the woman's ideology centered around right or justice, and duty. Each can, of

¹⁷Ida C. Clarke, "Feminism and the New Technique," Century Magazine, April, 1929, p. 754.

¹⁸Many books discuss feminism as a modern movement, at least in application. John and Mrs. Martin [sic], Feminism, Its Fallacies and Follies (New York: Dodd and Mead and Co., 1916), Albert J. McCulloch, Suffrage and Its Problems (Baltimore: Warwick and York, Inc., 1929), and Jacques Leclercq, Marriage and the Family (New York: Frederick Pustet Co., 1945), are three of the many.

course, be construed in different ways, but here, rights refers to those "natural rights" so ardently discussed at the time of the Revolution. Women used them and appealed to man's sense of justice to include her in this "life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness." The suffrage became paramount in this argument, and until the Nineteenth Amendment, overshadowed all other ideologies.

Duty, as used here, is an ambivalent term. It is first akin to the uniqueness argument and involves the work of a wife and mother; those things different from man. Yet it is also allied with suffrage, since woman argued that she could better perform her "duties" with the vote. The argument becomes involved and complicated in terminology but simplified by remembering that the whole revolves around enfranchisement. Lillie Devereux Blake expressed all the contradictions in this "right-justice-duty" ideology, in a speech before the Constitutional Commission of New York State in 1873:

We love our country as dearly as you do, we have toiled for it and wept for it in its dark hours, some of us have given up to its service what was nearest and dearest, but we stand before you today guilty of no crime, yet disfranchised. Gentlemen, do you think that this is just? You are here to do away with the wrongs and evils of

existing laws; will you not do away with this most intolerable evil which refuses to half the people of this state all voice in choosing their rulers? . . . In apology you will perhaps say that women have their own duties and responsibilities and that their place is home. To this we say most heartily Amen! A woman's place is home, and her first duty is to her children and it is on this account that she will surely be a most valuable and conscientious voter. The men of the state come up from the market place, from the stock board and from the bar-room to the ballot box; the women of the state will come from the fireside. Which, think you will bring the purest hands to the work? . . . And, that just so long as you deny to the mother heart all expression for its councils, so long will the miseries continue which today stain our civilization. The government is only the family on a large scale, and it is as unreasonable to banish women from the council chamber and the ballot-box as from the parlor and nursery. . . . The ship of state has heretofore moved forward as it were with only one engine. God has given it two impelling forces; man has condemned one to inaction. We ask that these bonds be removed and that the power that lies in maternity and tenderness, as well as the power that proceeds from struggle and wisdom, be employed to advance our beloved country on the road of human progress.¹⁹

Represented here are the special duties of women as advantageous; the appeal to the justice of men; and the argument from rights--all based on the vote. The argument is neatly woven and well presented by the impassioned plea of a mere "weak woman."²⁰ Yet it

¹⁹Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Autobiography, 1873.

²⁰Ibid.

was not a precedent setting argument, but a good summation. Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the first feminists, had employed the same reasoning almost a century before:

Make women rational creatures and free citizens, they will quickly become good wives and mothers--that is, if men do not neglect their duties as husband and fathers. . . . Let woman share the rights, . . . for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty.²¹

Thus the argument was not new to women reformers in post-Civil War America. The ideas were present and well used, if often melodramatic. In retrospect, the only difficulty is in reconciling all the opposites in a verbal presentation. The minds of some women were trained to follow only one such line of reasoning, but in the midst of other ideologies, a perspective is difficult. Moreover, the argument was continually reiterated through different media in different ways. Susan B. Anthony used: "Principles, not policy; justice, not favor; men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less,"²²

²¹Mary Wollstonecraft, The Rights of Women (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1929), pp. 197, 215.

²²Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage (eds.), The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. I: 1848-1861 (Rochester, N. Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1889), p. 46.

as the motto for her paper, The Revolution. And Frederick Douglass declared in his The North Star: "Our doctrine is that right is of no sex."²³

Considering all the components and means of expression, this ideology, centering around suffrage, was the most pervasive in the women's movement. From after the Civil War until the Nineteenth Amendment, it was employed, and effected a symbolic success, but actually gave way to another argument from uniqueness.

A third set of women's ideologies is in many respects the most interesting and forceful. It involved the usual and the expected opposing the unusual and unexpected; the patriotic and pious arguments against absurdities and nonsense ideologies. Both, of course, are part of any reform movement and must be expected and tolerated, yet, each time a fascinating originality appears, especially in the "absurdities." The women reformers who adhered to this set of arguments were no exception. It is highly unlikely that any real development resulted from this kind of ideology, but it, at least, was personally satisfying.

The various expressions from religion can be

²³Ibid., p. 75.

easily summarized in a single paraphrase: trust in God (or Him) and we will be victorious. The Grimke sisters were especially adept at using these pious statements, and applying them to women's reform movements:

Let us not faint; we have Jehovah on our side and the cause we are engaged in must prevail; but let us remember that the most powerful weapon we have to use is prayer, constant, fervent prayer.²⁴

and

Do the Lord's will in simplicity and leave the consequences in His hands.²⁵

and again,

. . . trust in Him who can pilot us thro' every storm.²⁶

It is important to notice the sincerity implied in these statements. A belief that victory was imminent, with God approving the work, was undoubtedly a good

²⁴Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (eds.), Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1934), p. 363. Letter from Sarah Grimke and Angelina Grimke to Sarah Douglass, Newark, New Jersey, February 22, 1837.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 419-20. Letter from Sarah and Angelina Grimke to Henry C. Wright, Groton, Massachusetts, August 8, 1837.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 441-42. Letter from Angelina Grimke to Theodore Weld, Brookline, Massachusetts, August 27, 1837.

psychological beginning. Moreover, the religious argument was repeatedly advocated by the editors of Godey's Ladies' Book, the most popular magazine for women in the nineteenth century. A typical example is the following:

1. She shall be called woman. Gen. 2:23.
2. I will put enmity between thee and the woman. Gen. 3:15.
3. A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Prov. 31:30.
4. Blessed art thou among women. St. Luke 1:28.
5. God sent forth his son, made of a woman. Gal. 4:4.
6. The woman is the glory of the man. I Cor. 11:7.
7. A woman clothed with the sun. Rev. 12:1.

The Bible is woman's Magna Carta. In this blessed book her destiny is predicted; her duties are defined; and her privileges made sure by the unalterable promise of God.²⁷

The pose of the Church, or the role of religion, resulted in a curious ambivalence. Originally, it was used as a means of keeping woman in an inferior position, but by a curious reversal, was eventually assumed by the feminists to advance their own cause. Later on, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others were to write a Woman's Bible,²⁸ showing how the scriptures

²⁷Mrs. Sarah J. Hale (ed.), Godey's Ladies' Book (Philadelphia: Louis A. Godey, Publisher's Hall, April, 1863), p. 397.

²⁸It is not our purpose to discuss the problems of publishing the Woman's Bible, which were,

were actually feminist documents. With this protean quality, "religion" could survive and strengthen any reform position, and became the pious perennial.

In the realm of patriotism, the women were, also, using emotional appeals. Besides such objects of reverence as the Flag and the Constitution, the feminists employed such slogans as "No taxation without representation," and dramatically orated how they had raised and stood beside the great "sons" of America through all trials. They argued that their role in the making of America through wars, building an empire, the westward movement, and others, was primarily concerned with the country and, thus, equally patriotic.

However, the object which occasioned the most patriotism, especially by reformers, was the Declaration of Independence. Women were especially cognizant of its phraseology and used it to begin the movement for women's rights in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The following are some of the parallel arguments in a "Declaration of Principles":

indeed, involved. Kraditor, op. cit., has a good account in her Chapter IV: "Woman Suffrage and Religion." For our intents, it is enough to know that such a document existed.

Declaration of Independence

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth . . .

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed . . .

Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies;

The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.²⁹

(The Declaration of Independence listed eighteen grievances--as did the Declaration of Principles. Some of the latter are listed in the next column.)

Declaration of Principles

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied . . .

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal . . .

Such has been the patient sufferance of the women, under this Government . . .

The history of man-kind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she has no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are

²⁹The quotations from the Declaration of Independence are taken from the copy included in American Historical Documents, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960), pp. 81-85.

given to the most ignorant and degraded . . .

He has endeavored in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.³⁰

Eighteen objections were listed in both Declarations; the women substituted "man" for King George, and thus, used "He" to refer to all men. For the women, the result of such a "Declaration" was also equal to the July 4th statement for the United States: it was ground on which to stand; psychologically conducive to carrying a whole movement; and patriotically revered as symbolic.

Combined with religion, this argument from patriotism has been a constant in reform movements. Employed differently, depending on the reform, they have continually sustained social movements with their versatility. Moreover, the emotional appeal latent in these two approaches could easily be aroused and intensified. It is in this latter approach where the

³⁰The quotes from the women's Declaration of Principles were taken from the first volume of The History of Woman's Suffrage, op. cit., pp. 70-73.

women succeeded.

Opposed to this patriotic ideology is a set of arguments which, for a lack of a better term, can be called inevitable absurdities: inevitable, because every reform has them, and absurdities, because they were unbelievable, often comic, and not efficacious. Carry Nation is a good example here. Her "hatchetation" was often absurd in method but not in dramatics: it at least worked for her. Other means, however, were nonsense. For example, in her attack against tobacco, she often "tackled men walking past her with cigars in their mouths."³¹ Her campaign failed.

Lillie Devereux Blake also used an absurd ideology in many of her speeches. Her primary purpose was the elevation of her sex by showing how superior women actually were. A constant argument was in her anger against the portrayal of Justice, Liberty, Peace, Truth, and other virtues as women. To her, each representation should have "fetters on her wrists."³² Other arguments of hers were in the same vein. At one

³¹Ishbel Ross, Charmers and Cranks, Twelve Famous American Women Who Defied Conventions (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 188.

³²Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Autobiography, 1873.

time, she suggested that if women were in the legislatures, there would not have been a Spanish American War;³³ at another time: "We hear a great deal this year about the forefathers. Would it not be well to remember the foremothers also?"³⁴; and once again, the most absurd argument, on the "Sex of the National Bird":

The American eagle--that great bird which surmounts our national insignia--that great bird, ladies, is of the feminine gender. It is a fact, ladies--an ornithological fact. The sex of the bird is absolutely indicated by the white tuft of feathers on its head and breast. I will also tell you another ornithological fact. The female eagle is larger and stronger than the male.³⁵

Yet, Mrs. Blake did not stop with this plea. Her sustained ideological absurdity came through her Fables³⁶ which she had published, modeled on Aesop. In the manner of a good melodrama, woman was the good "Pussy

³³Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Letter to Lillie Devereux Blake from Orna Langhorne, April 10, 1899, Folder "1899."

³⁴Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Scrapbook of Lillie Devereux Blake Newspaper Writings: 1876-1903, p. 71, n.d.

³⁵Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection, Folder "1898", newspaper clipping, n.d.

³⁶Missouri Historical Society, Blake Collection: The Fables of Lillie Devereux Blake (New York: Oliver J. Blaber Printer, 1879).

Cat," vs. the "Naughty Dog,"³⁷ or the "Canary Bird," against the "Turkey Gobbler,"³⁸ or even the "Poor Sheep," against the "Cruel Goats."³⁹ To Mrs. Blake's credit is originality--yet no advancement resulted. It is one thing to elevate the position of women; another to employ a senseless argument.

Thus, the ideology employed by the women reformers cannot be neatly stated in a single phrase or even a sentence. Depending upon the reform, or even the woman, the arguments differed. Most often they proved contradictory and ambiguous, and sometimes effected nothing. The one common denominator was the hope of elevating the position of women, and since the struggle was so difficult, what did it matter if the arguments were sometimes incongruous? At least the attempt was made, and more information was added to the study of the character of the American woman.

³⁷From the Fable, "The Pussy Cat's House."

³⁸From the Fable, "The Worn-Out Turkey Gobbler."

³⁹From the Fable, "The Cruel Goats."

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN REFORMER: IN FASHION, SONG, CARTOON, AND DRAMA

Reform movements often consist of more than one method, one object, one result operations. In their search for a change in a basic, personal wrong, reformers often encounter "fringes" either in minor reforms, methods, or purposes. Perhaps by changing a lesser wrong or by using a different approach, the reform could more easily be realized. Some adjuncts of reform are, of course, more efficacious than others, and some are complete failures. However, the essence of the reformer's idea is this change and experimentation. A degree of "wrongness" is not recognized until the outcome of the reform is decided.

The movement for women's rights considered several contingencies in an effort to effect more easily and better the "equality" deemed so basic. Compositely considered, these elements equal a part of the social history of the woman's rights movement.

Four will be considered here: fashion, songs, cartoons, and drama.

Of those being discussed, dress became the only reform. In some circles it developed to major proportions, and dominated, even confused, the primary reform. Indeed, it was not necessary to the reform objectified in the ballot, as evidenced by the change in the 1920's. Its expression became a visual ideology, and eventually, a failure. Yet, because of its appearance, dress reform recruited more members to the movement for women's rights, and thus, became an indirect catalyst to the victory of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Another addition to reform, song, or more accurately, folksongs, became a method, not a reform. For reasons which will be discussed later, the women's songs provided a cohesiveness which definitely aided the primary objective. Alone, the songs are without value; considered as implementing a reform movement, they become very useful. Dramatic demonstration, an important part of reform, was served and significantly aided by these songs of protest.

The woman in editorial cartoons provides a third important means to a better discussion of women's

rights and the character of the American woman. However, more than a method or a means, cartoons served as a distinct argument in a literal meaning of the time-worn cliché, "a picture is worth a thousand words." For, when suffrage became the chief objective of the women reformers, cartoons became a primary means of argument. A representative selection is very difficult. Moreover, these cartoons provided the woman a mirror in which she could see her public image, and react accordingly. To argue through cartoons and to be depicted in them provided the woman with a two-fold attack.

A fourth and final fringe of the feminist movement, drama, must be considered in retrospect. Most of the feminist plays were written after the vote was achieved, as historical drama, and serve as a mere dramatic presentation of the struggle. Others conceived during the women's rights movement border on maudlinism and make it very difficult to reconcile their importance within the whole. The mere presence of scripts for plays, however, serves to show the extent to which the woman reformer went in her search for "equality." No means seemed inadequate, no method extraneous, in the hydra-like quality of women's rights.

Dress Reform

During the last fifty years of the nineteenth century, the reform of woman's dress played a very important part in the movement for women's rights. Clubs, societies, and even colonies were formed to protest the woman's subjection and "slavery"¹ to her "drapery and rags."² The fact that no permanent, pervading solutions came from fifty years of agitation in no way stamps the reform as futile. At least, an argument was created by these clothes-conscious feminists which produced results many years later. For, paradoxically, after the suffrage was achieved, its desired result as a cure-all was not but other concerns of women were given more freedom of expression, and dress benefitted here. Moreover, a discussion of the American woman's dress reveals something of her character, which is our primary concern.

In The Psychology of Dress, Elizabeth Hurlock writes:

¹Theodore Stanton and Harriet Stanton Blatch (eds.), Elizabeth Cady Stanton, As Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscences (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1922), II, 45. Letter to Lucretia Mott, Seneca Falls, New York, August 20, 1873.

²Ibid.

The social ideal of women is well displayed by her clothing. When women are given an unimportant position in the social order, their clothing is inferior to that of men in richness of material and wealth of ornamentation. When on the other hand, their contact with public life elevates them to a position not far below that which the men hold, their clothing then approximates that of the men both in richness and in freedom from hampering ornamentation.³

As mentioned above (Chapter I), the position of the women in pre-Civil War American society was changing for the better--albeit slowly--but changing. She was still below man, inferior to him, but not as subordinate as often inferred. Here, Mrs. Hurlock's quote can be well applied, for it was at this time, after Seneca Falls, when the dress reform began. Curiously, the first important change in the dress attempted to approximate the clothes of men. The feminists argued that such a move could more readily and easily change their "inequality." Bloomers were thus born. (Figure 1)⁴

Elizabeth Smith Miller, urged on "by the intense feeling of her father on the question of

³Elizabeth B. Hurlock, The Psychology of Dress, An Analysis of Fashion and Its Motive (New York: The Ronald Press, 1929), p. 221.

⁴Figures 1 and 2 were taken from R. Turner Wilcox, Five Centuries of American Costume (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 152, 155.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 9

woman's dress,"⁵ as he said, "the long skirt was the symbol of her degradation,"⁶ originated the Turkish-like costume, and Mrs. Amelia Bloomer,⁷ gave it a name. Soon, many of the leading feminists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Grimke sisters, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone,⁸ were wearing the man-like dress. The original argument for the Bloomer was based on man's domination and woman's inferior position,⁹ yet some adopted the "short dress" at the very insistence of the fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers who were concerned about feminine health in the

⁵Stanton and Blatch, op. cit., p. 173.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Margaret Farrand Thorp, Female Persuasion: Six Strong-Minded Women (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 130, reports Mrs. Bloomer's reasoning: "The first fashion we have any record of was set by Adam and Eve, and we are not told that there was any difference in the styles worn by them. 'And they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.' Gen. 3:7. Nothing here to show that his apron was bifurcated and hers not; that hers was long and his short. We are led to suppose that they were just alike."

⁸Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage (eds.), The History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. I, 1848-1861 (Rochester, N. Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1889), p. 844.

⁹Many books on woman's reform discuss the Bloomer costume, and almost all of them consider this reason.

"crippling, cribbing influence of her costume."¹⁰

Still others desired mere personal freedom of movement as Elizabeth Cady Stanton states in flowery and exuberant language:

I wore the dress for two years and found it a great blessing. What a sense of liberty, I felt, in running up and down stairs with my hands free to carry whatsoever I would, to trip through the rain or snow with no skirts to hold or brush, ready at any moment to climb a hill-top to see the sun go down, or the moon rise, with no ruffles or trails to be limped by the dew, or soiled by the grass. What an emancipation from little petty vexatious trammels and annoyances every hour of the day.¹¹

Yet this freedom was short-lived. The "Bloomer girls" were constantly harassed and jeered at while wearing the dress. Mrs. E. Stanton relates her "agony" in a letter to the designer Elizabeth Smith Miller:

Julius, how long will the heathen rage? I have received another awful shot about the short dress, and seven vials of wrath have been poured on my devoted head. I think they were bottled by one of my New York sisters. . . . We are very much like the poor fox in the fable who having cut off his tail and not being able to restore it, found that nothing remained for him to do but to persuade the other foxes to do likewise that he might not be a by-word among his kind. As we have performed this surgical operation on our entire wardrobe, nothing remains for us to do but to induce as many as possible to follow our example. We can have no peace in traveling

¹⁰Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, op. cit., p. 470.

¹¹Ibid.

until we cut off the great national petticoat.
God grant that we may be more successful than
the fox.¹²

This ridicule was eventually to prove to be excessive and difficult to accept. "Tyrant custom"¹³ in the hands of the same men who advocated changes because of health and purity, was eventually victorious. Yet the feminist dress reformers philosophically, and quite frankly accepted the decision:

We knew the Bloomer costume never could be generally becoming, as it required a perfection of form, limbs, and feet such as few possessed, and we who wore it also knew that it was not artistic. Though the martyrdom proved too much for us who had so many other measures to press on the public conscience, yet no experiment is lost, however evanescent, that rouses thought to the injurious consequences of the present style of dress, sacrificing to its absurdities so many of the most promising girls of this generation.¹⁴

In this quotation, two important statements are made: of lesser value, an unexpected derogatory admission on the part of women concerning feminine beauty, and, of greater value, an insight into the character of the woman reformer. Perhaps it can be termed a singleness

¹²Stanton and Blatch, op. cit., II, 34. Letter to Elizabeth Smith Miller, Seneca Falls, New York, August 5, 1851.

¹³Stanton and Blatch, op. cit., I, 174.

¹⁴Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, op. cit., p. 471.

of purpose, or practicality. Call it what one will, the Bloomer was seen as inefficacious and detrimental to the rising objective of suffrage. To their credit, the feminists realistically recognized this first dress reform at its face value: an arousal of public sentiment. It was clearly understood that another reform took precedence.

Other feminist costumes were, of course, considered as possibilities for a reform dress. In her "Reminiscences," Elizabeth Cady Stanton mentions that "the costume in which Diana the Huntress is represented, . . . would have been more artistic and as convenient."¹⁵ Yet practicality, reality, and sheer common sense interfered and persuaded the feminists to recognize the struggle for the ballot as requiring more initiative.

Another object of attack for the dress reformers was the corset. Here, however, the reform was viewed with mixed emotions, for the corset was both a stimulus to woman's vanity and a threat to her health. Inherent in the latter is the symbolism of woman's inferiority, her repressed potential, if you will.

¹⁵Stanton and Blatch, op. cit., I, 173-74.

Yet the argument from vanity was to succeed for many years.

In the years immediately preceding the Civil War, and especially in the decades after, until about 1900, the American woman considered the "wasp waist" or "illusion waist" as an ideal, and a "prime mark of gentility."¹⁶ Whalebone provided the means and no method seemed to be overlooked in applying such armor or improving it. "A favorite technique was for the lady to tie her corset strings to a bedpost, expel her breath and walk as far away as possible."¹⁷ At other times, a woman would lie on the floor while another, "with one foot on her back, tightened the cords of her stays."¹⁸ The results to health were obviously bad, yet were unheeded by the vain women. Corset-making became a major industry, and as early as 1866, a manufacturer estimated that the demand was equal to

¹⁶Robert E. Riegel, Young America, 1830-1840 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), p. 203.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸David L. Cohn, The Good Old Days, A History of American Morals and Manners as Seen Through the Sears, Roebuck Catalogs, 1905 to the Present (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), p. 368.

50,000 per day.¹⁹ By 1900, "the domestic corset production was valued at \$14,000,000."²⁰ These figures can be easily understood by a mere glance at the early Sears and Roebuck Catalogues.²¹ The pictures of the corsets and the number and varieties for sale are almost limitless: four-in-hand corsets, nurse's corsets, Dr. Warner's health corset, and his abdominal corset;²² and, each one carrying the same direction: "In ordering corsets always give size. Take the size from the waist, never from the bust. Deduct about 2 inches from waist measure for size of corset."²³ The supposed results from the "bones," "esthetic pleasure,"²⁴ were not to be denied the woman, nor was a second motive, the pose of the "genteel female." For, "the tighter the corset, the more ladylike the sufferer."²⁵

¹⁹Ibid., p. 373.

²⁰Ibid., p. 374.

²¹The Vatican Film Library in Pius XII Memorial Library, Saint Louis University, has all the volumes of the catalogue on microfilm.

²²Sears, Roebuck Catalog, General Catalog, 1895, p. 320.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Riegel, op. cit., p. 203.

²⁵Andrew Sinclair, The Better Half, The Emancipation of the American Woman (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), p. 104. }

Yet the corset reformers had not finished their attack and when they did, women's rights benefitted, not women's vanity. (Figures 3-6)²⁶

Discounting such early corset reformers as Dr. Hugh Smith,²⁷ a first great reformer was O. S. Fowler, who in 1849 became the determined enemy of the corset in his editorship of the American Phrenological Journal.²⁸ Operating under the motto: "Total Abstinence or No Husbands--Natural Waists or No Wives," delivering speeches, writing articles, and even books on the subject, Fowler succeeded in forming Anti-Lacing Societies.²⁹ Moreover, he gave the initiative to other reformers and journals. The Ladies' Repository took up this anti-corset reform³⁰ as did Lydia Sayer Hasbrouck in her publication, The Sibyl;³¹ even Louisa May Alcott decried the effects of the corset in

²⁶Figures 3-6 are taken from Norah Waugh, Corsets and Crinolines (London: B. T. Batsford, L.T.D., 1954), pp. 81, 85.

²⁷Cohn, op. cit., p. 368.

²⁸Ibid., p. 369.

²⁹Ibid., p. 370.

³⁰"Dress Reform," The Ladies' Repository, June, 1875, is one example among many.

³¹Bertha Stearns, "Reform Periodicals and Female Reformers," American Historical Review, XXXVII, No. 4 (July, 1932), 678-99, discusses The Sibyl.

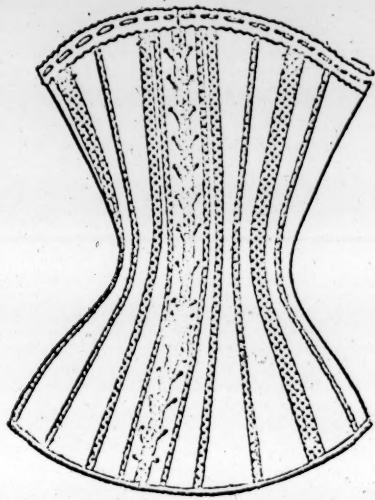


Fig. 3

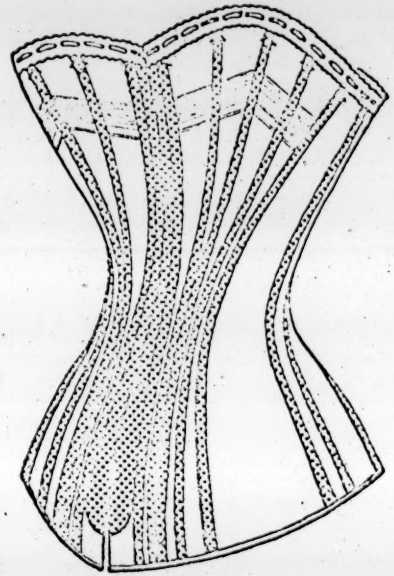


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

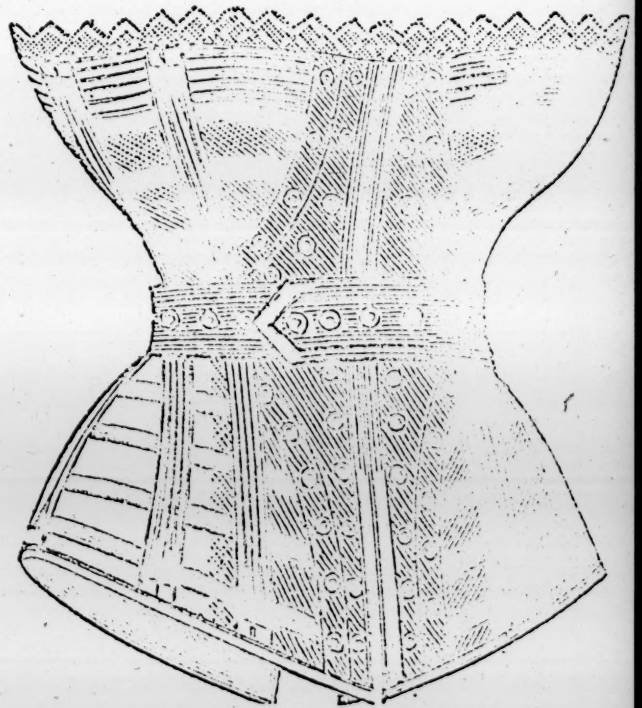


Fig. 6

Eight Cousins.³² Also, the most popular publication of the day, Godey's Ladies' Book, became seriously concerned for reasons of health. A lengthy, but typical example is the following:

EFFECTS OF TIGHT LACING

1. Tight lacing seriously limits, indeed almost annihilates the respiratory movements of the diaphragm, for the pinch comes on just that portion of the ribs to which this great muscle is attached, and squeezes them together so as to throw it almost or altogether out of work. The lungs do not then appropriate the proper amount of air; the blood is not completely aerated, and carbonic acid accumulates. This substance, in sufficient quantities, is, as everyone is aware, a deadly poison, and its effect upon the system when thus continuously present, even though in limited quantities, is extremely injurious.

2. The corset, by constant pressure upon the muscles which support the spine, impairs their nutrition, and pains in the back and weakness are more or less constantly present.

3. Not only does the corset thus interfere with the growth and nutrition of the muscles, but by its pressure upon the bust, often produces much discomfort. The glands are so squeezed, and especially the nipples are so flattened, from an early period after puberty, that when the time comes for nursing an infant, the young mother finds, either that she cannot suckle at all, or must do so in great misery from inflamed nipples, abscesses, etc.

4. The digestive process is more or less interfered with, from the cramped condition of the stomach and other digestive organs, and dyspepsia, with its train of horrible evils, is often induced.

5. The liver and other emunctories of the

³²Cohn, op. cit., p. 371.

body, from their strained and unnatural position, do not perform their office of purifying the blood properly and languor, debility, and headaches arise as a consequence.

6. The bowels, for similar reasons, are slow and imperfect in their action, and constipation, bad breath, and offensive exhalations from the skin ensue.

7. The nerves and bloodvessels are irritated and interfered with, and cold hands and feet, fainting fits and hysteria are common occurrences.³³

Songs became another means of attack to help women in seeing the wrongs of corsets. The aim was usually to frighten the wearer into abandoning the whalebone:

Song of the Corset

The beautiful girls, with the sunbright curls,
Submit to my pressure sly,
Till the hectic streak and the sunken cheek
Proclaim the destroyer nigh! . . .
Oh, she soon will feel that my suicide steel
Must stifle her panting breath!
That the sable pall must o'ershadow all
In CONSUMPTION and pain and death!³⁴

Yet, the woman refused to be intimidated and allowed her vanity to conquer. Only when more and more doctors entered into the argument with their charts and figures and "frightening, horrendous photographs of twisted livers, telescoped lungs, and bladders and

³³"Effects of Tight Lacing," Godey's Ladies' Book, June, 1872, p. 575.

³⁴Riegel, op. cit., p. 203.

stomachs crumpled like wet blotting paper,"³⁵ did the woman take heed. Only in the scientific, and thus mysterious and magical pronouncements of medical men was the corset reform finally won: "The maximum pressure of the corset is 1.625 pounds to the square inch during inspiration, making the total estimated pressure 30 to 80 pounds."³⁶ Yet the haters of corsets, the dress reformers, were not really victorious, for the corsets, in a modified form with new materials and perhaps a different name, reappeared in later years. It was the feminists, the advocates of woman's rights, who benefitted. For they consciously believed, literally and figuratively, that women were "held in" by corsets, and must be symbolically released. Getting rid of the whalebone was necessary for free expression and a resultant "equal" position.

Some other dress reforms centered around personalities and were, for the most part, individually conducted. Frances Willard and Dr. Mary Walker were two such reformers. The former is primarily known for her work in the Women's Christian Temperance Union,

³⁵Cohn, op. cit., p. 375.

³⁶Ibid., p. 374.

and can be discussed briefly. The latter, however, was concerned primarily with dress reform and in her purpose vies with Carry Nation as the eccentric woman reformer. Let us consider each.

The temperance reform under the direction of the W.C.T.U. and Frances Willard became a major social movement in the decades after the Civil War. It was not tangential to the women's rights movement, but a vital part of it: a reform within a reform. Moreover, dress was included in this temperance work, and unlike its connection to the feminist movement, became an integral part of the objective. Hence, the terminology becomes involved: a reform (dress) within a reform (temperance) within a reform (women's rights). Here, however, dress becomes essential. Frances Willard summarized the objective very well:

Catch Edison and constrict him inside a wasp waistcoat, and be sure you'll get no more inventions; bind a bustle upon Bismarck, and farewell to German unity; coerce Robert Browning into corsets, and you'll have no more epics; put Parnell into petticoats, and Home Rule is a lost cause.³⁷

An obvious solution was to change the dress and as a first important step, "the W.C.T.U. offered prizes for

³⁷Helen Beal Woodward, The Bold Women (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1953), p. 294.

the design of free garments and its journals carried advertisements for dress reform shops and for less restrictive corsets."³⁸ As Frances Willard said: "Niggardly waists and niggardly brains go together."³⁹ A second important step was taken concerning physical exercise. It was obviously impossible to perform such physical exertions in a mountain of clothes, and a freer dress was, thus, designed. The W.C.T.U. even "formed a department of Physical Culture and young Temperance women demonstrated the use of the dumbbell at W.C.T.U. conventions."⁴⁰ Women, through temperance work, thus, became identified with the new dress reform. The third connection with women and dress and temperance was the bicycle. Led by Frances Willard, the temperance women daringly rode these "bikes" in public, and again a new dress was formed: "[the bicycle] forced the skirt to divide and resemble a pair of flapping trousers."⁴¹ (See Figure 2.) A

³⁸Joseph R. Gusfield, Symbolic Crusade, Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963), p. 90.

³⁹Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Rise of the City, 1878-1898 (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933), p. 149.

⁴⁰Gusfield, op. cit., p. 90.

⁴¹Sinclair, op. cit., p. 107.

new dress was quietly and unobtrusively being accepted for women, and importantly, became a part of a major reform. Under Frances Willard and her W.C.T.U. these actions were not far removed from the customs of the day. "They not only provided one anchor of critical orientation toward the prevailing social patterns but also bolstered the identification of Temperance itself with a favorable attitude to change."⁴² Thus, dress reform was masterfully identified in a quiet and subtle manner with a major reform, and in the eventual success inherently carried the reason why the aggressive dress reformers were not successful.

In a position directly opposite Frances Willard, her temperance women, and their quiet rebellion in dress was the notorious and eccentric Dr. Mary Walker. She represents a clear reason why the dress reform was not essential and successful in the feminist movement. Shunned and ignored by the leading women reformers at conventions and meetings, brash Mary Walker, M.D., was not to be denied. She ardently and vociferously maintained that the whole problem of the equality of women revolved around her dress: "If women had never

⁴²Gusfield, op. cit., p. 90.

written symphonies or discovered the laws of thermodynamics, it was because they hadn't been dressed for it."⁴³ To remedy this situation, Mary Walker took exaggerated measures like wearing men's clothes and even founding "a female colony called Adamless Eve to prove that the anatomy of women was similar to that of men."⁴⁴ Later, she became the only one concerned in the American Dress Reform: she designed it, led the movement, and explained its "special" features:

. . . the frock hanging clear of the body, for freedom, and stopping at the knees, to prevent being trodden upon; the underdrawers folded over the ankles, with the stockings adjusted over the drawers, thereby eliminating garters while keeping the ankles warm; the trousers buttoned to the undersuit or arranged with the usual suspenders.⁴⁵

Her illogical conclusion was that "if wives adopted the Reform Dress, there would be no more frigid women."⁴⁶ Already handicapped the feminists became even more so by such statements, but Dr. Mary Walker expounded further:

⁴³Woodward, op. cit., p. 293.

⁴⁴Sinclair, op. cit., p. 261.

⁴⁵Woodward, op. cit., p. 294.

⁴⁶Ibid.

One of the greatest sources of unhappiness in the marriage relation, results directly from the chilling influences that freeze up the sympathies of wives, that have been so overburdened with clothes that they could not cultivate the flowers of beauty in the garden of the soul, where the chilling winds of nervousness were constantly blowing away all beautiful sentiments.

If men were really what they profess to be . . . they would not compel women to dress so that the facilities for vice would always be easy, but would sanction a Dress that is quite the reverse . . .⁴⁷

Her reform was obviously unsuccessful, and although only a single movement, her action serves to emphasize and underscore the failure of dress reforming as a non-essential to the suffrage argument. Positively, however, Mary Walker's argument stresses the presentation of dress as a reform, albeit a minor one, and the wide variety of methods used.

By 1900, there was no more movement for dress reform, which can be explained in several ways. The actions of a Frances Willard provide a first reason, for many women were wearing the shorter dress and divided skirt for gymnastics and exercising. This had a marked influence on the change in everyday clothes. Secondly, as in the Bloomer craze, women reformers recognized that dress was not as important

⁴⁷Ibid.

as suffrage, and that an agitation for clothes would probably hinder enfranchisement. Thirdly, certain social changes made a dress reform unnecessary. More opportunities in labor, education, and society were opened to women by the end of the nineteenth century and no major reform had occurred. The argument in the 1850's which stated that a new dress would improve woman's position was no longer tenable.⁴⁸ Greater changes in dress came after the vote was achieved; greater in fact, than thought possible by the feminists of Seneca Falls. In the accompanying illustrations (Figures 7 and 8)⁴⁹ notice the change in women's clothes from 1850 to 1900. They are not drastic but nevertheless are changes which occurred even with the failure of a dress reform. However, when one sees the changes from 1850 to 1927 and later, the argument for emancipation can be more clearly understood. The modifications are even more dramatic in the several detailed inserts presented for every 10 years from

⁴⁸Robert E. Riegel, "Women's Clothes and Women's Rights," American Quarterly, XV (Fall, 1963), 390-401, discusses this reasoning.

⁴⁹Figures 7 through 21 are in Fairfax Proudfit Walkup, Dressing the Part (New York: F. S. Crofts, and Co., 1947), passim.

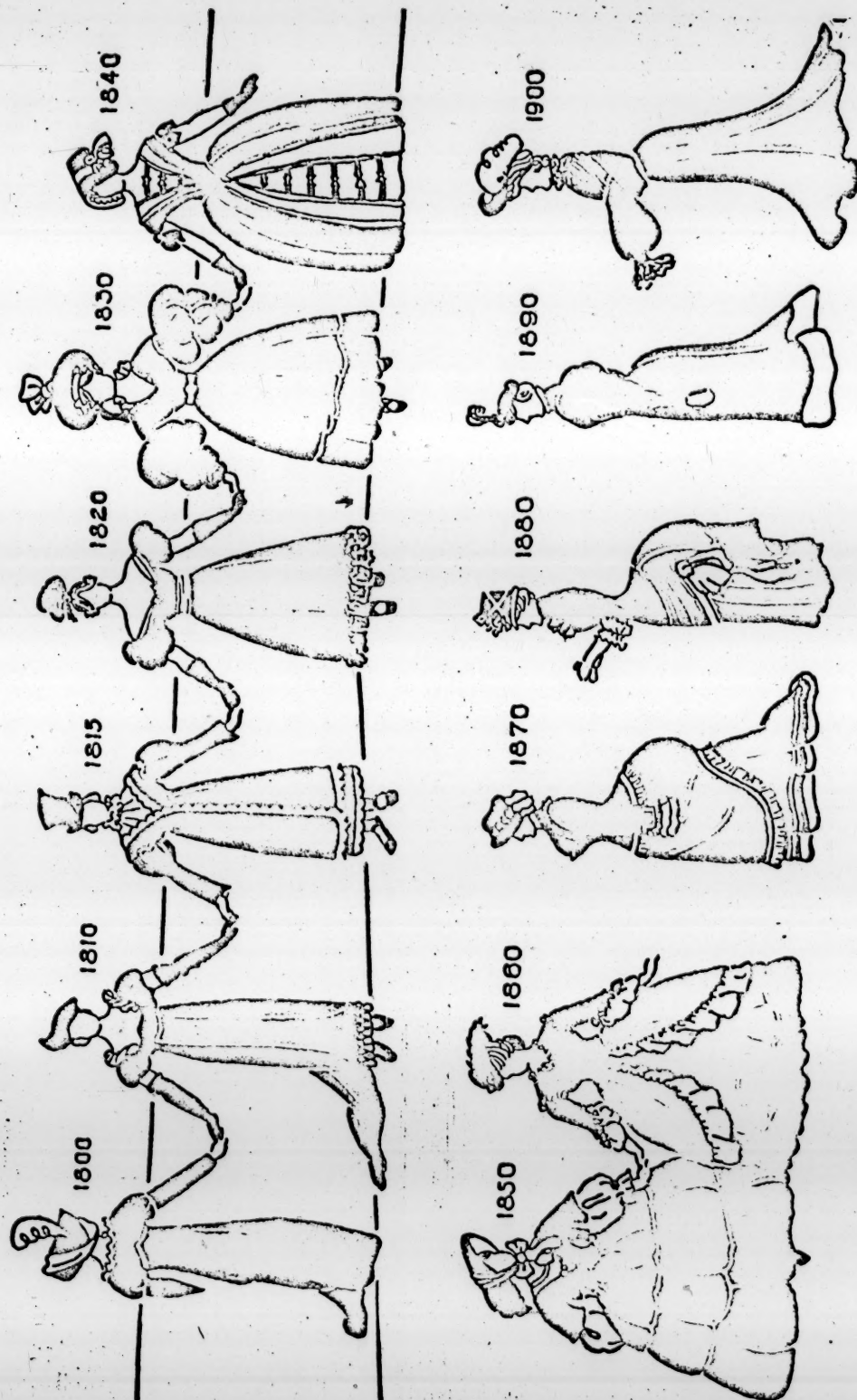


Fig. 7

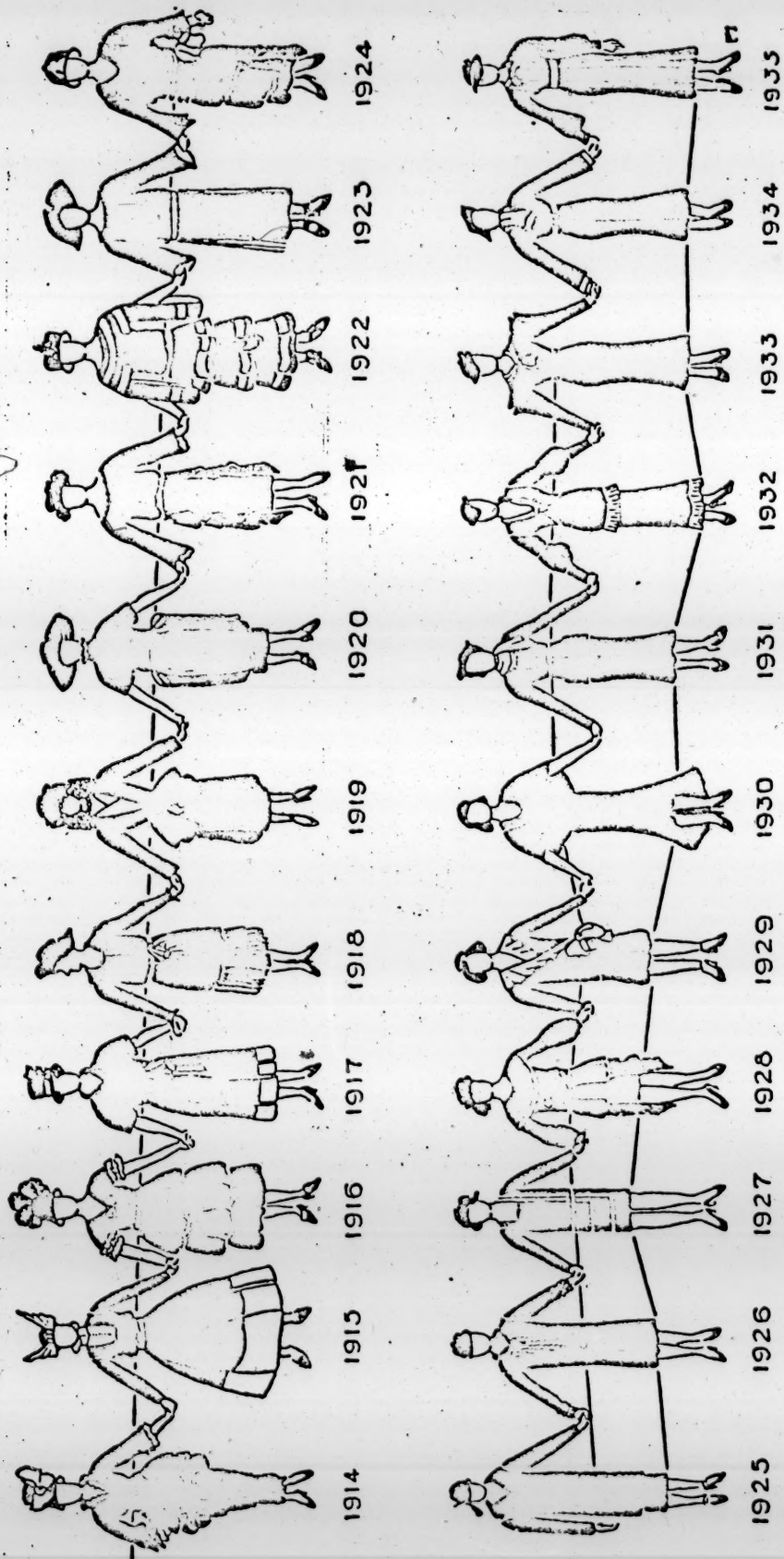


Fig. 8

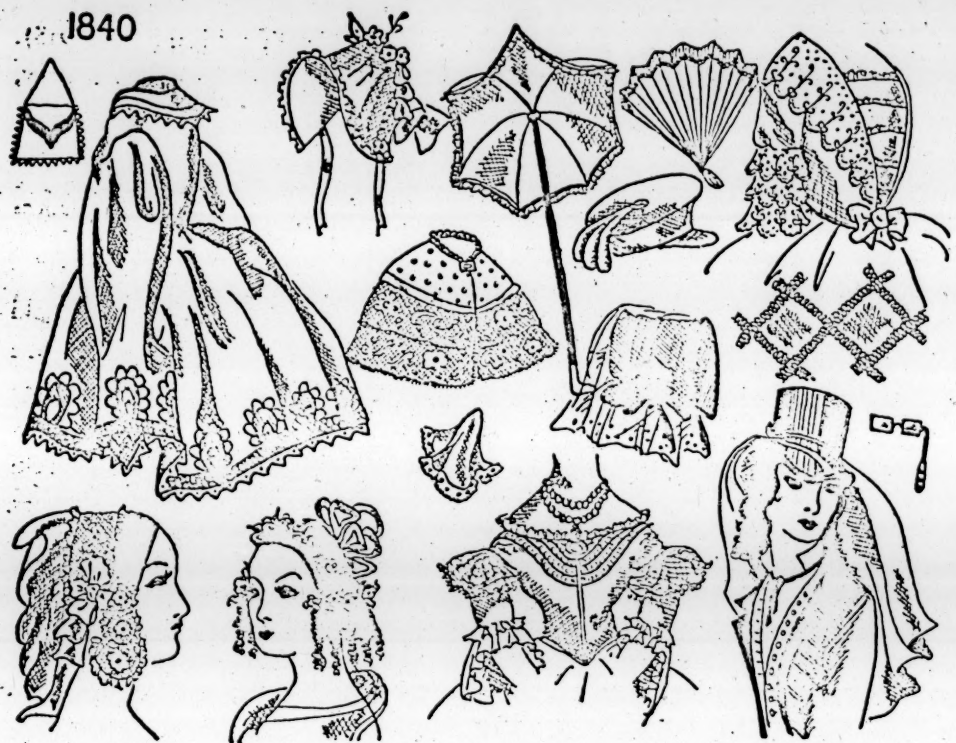


Fig. 12

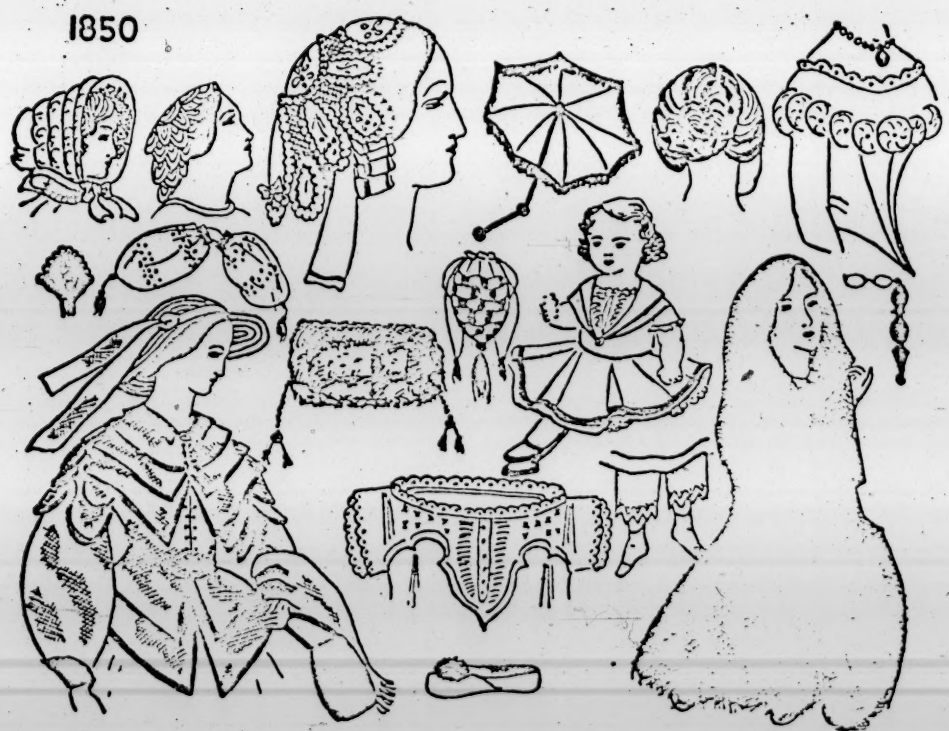


Fig. 13

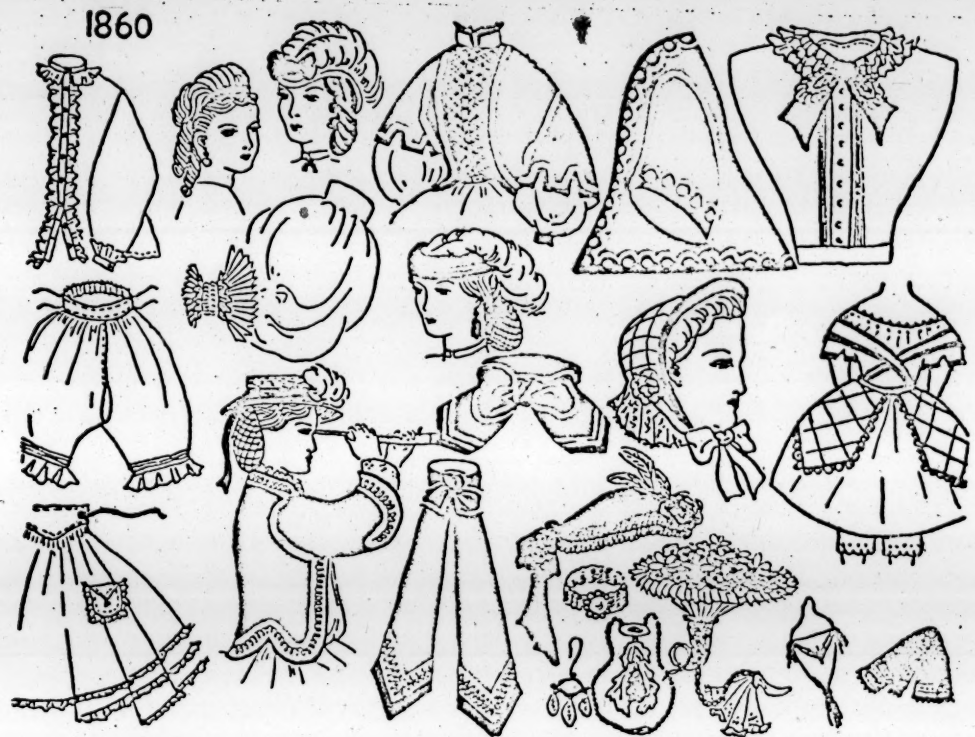


Fig. 14

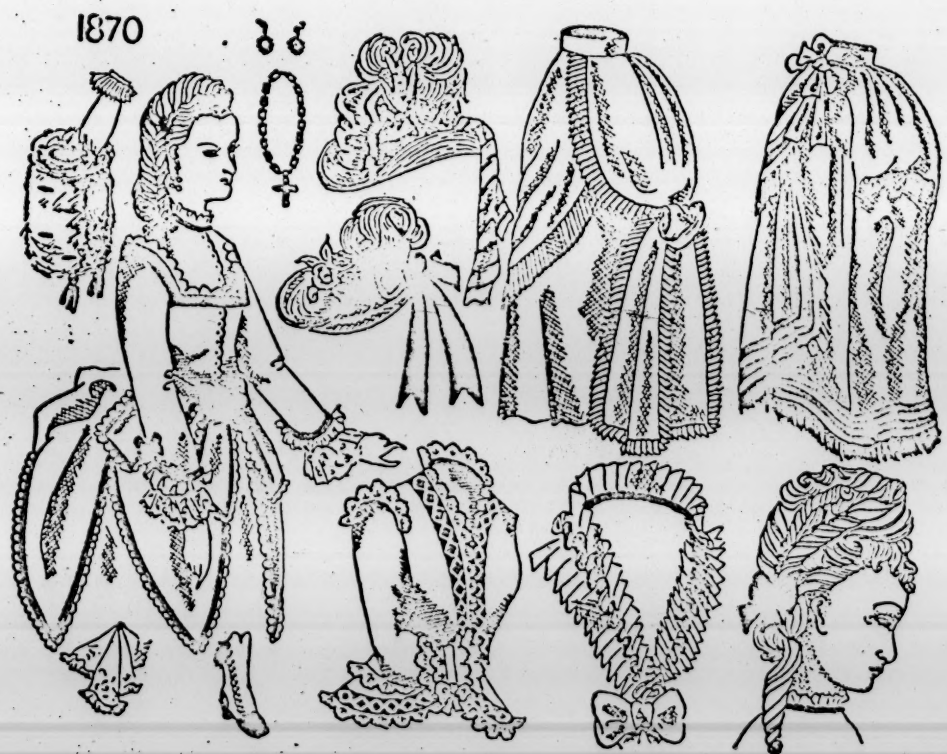


Fig. 15

1880

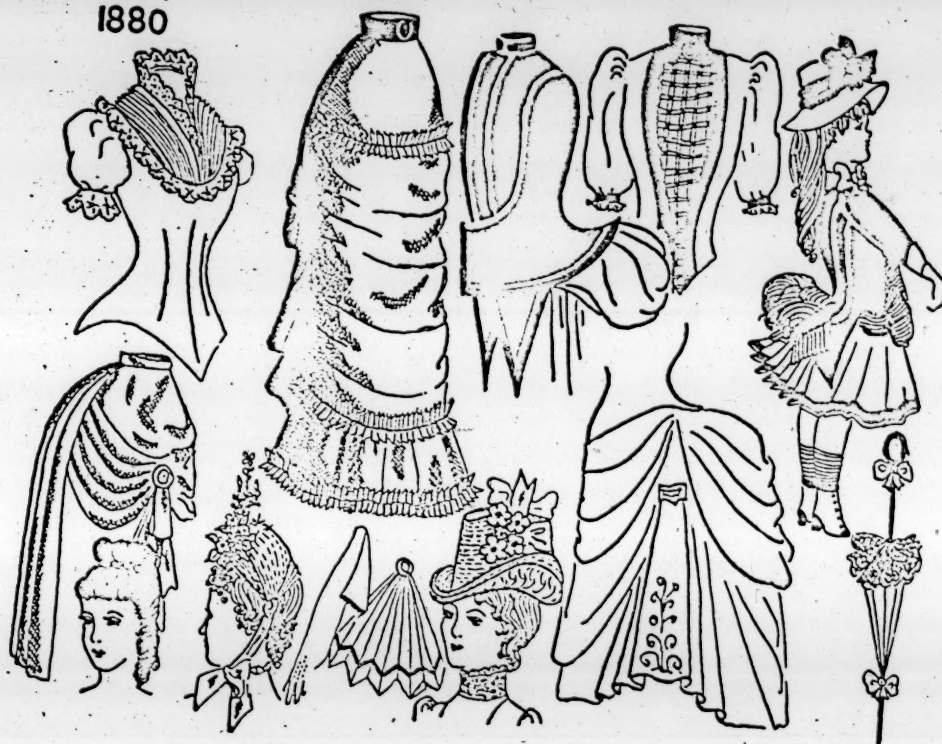


Fig. 16

1890



Fig. 17

1900

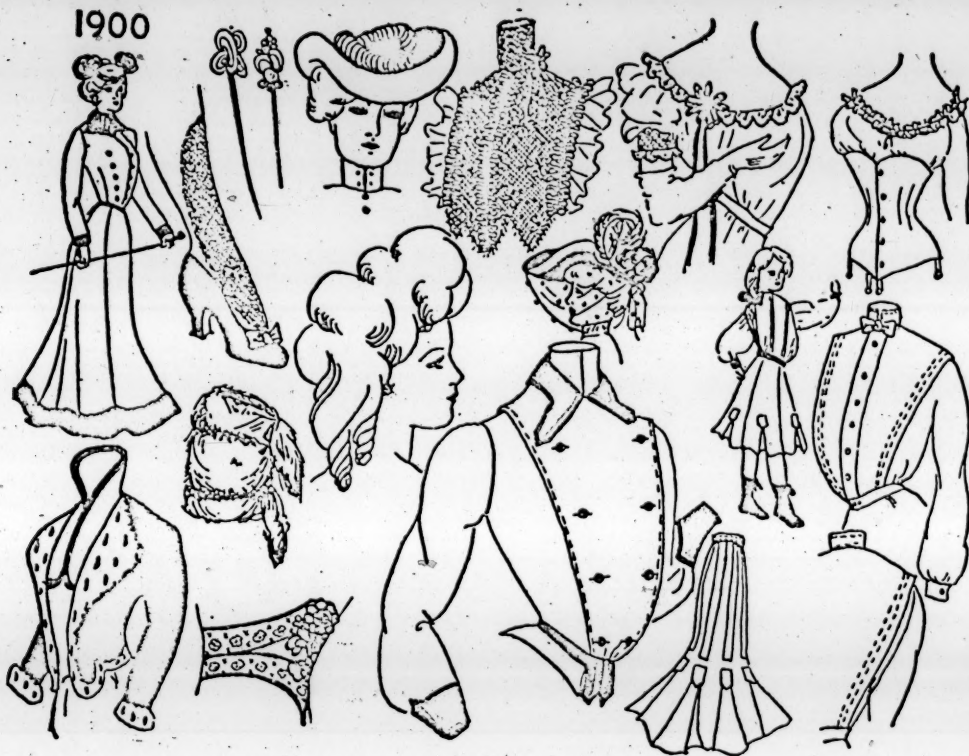


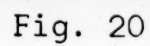
Fig. 18

1910

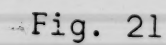


Fig. 19

1920



1930



1800 to 1930. (Figures 9-21) The number of "accessories" needed to dress in 1850 diminishes remarkably after 1900 and even after 1920. For after the struggle for the vote, the emphasis seems to be placed on styles of dress, transferring the number of articles used by women in dressing to different outfits and not the same dress. (Indeed, a discussion of dress reform and woman's position could be continued to the present day, substituting identity for the ballot. Certainly the concern for style in dress is equally as ardent in recent times, if not more than it was in the nineteenth century. Yet the spirit of reform was more vital during the women's rights movement than after the 19th Amendment. Such vitality provides for a better discussion of woman's dress.)

Songs

Of all the methods used by the woman reformer to achieve her objective of equality, songs were the most dramatic and traditional.⁵⁰ In national conventions, state meetings, parades, local meetings, and even in journals, songs and sonnets were constantly

⁵⁰Irwin Silber, "Singing Suffragettes Sang for Women's Votes and Equal Rights," Sing Out, VI (Winter, 1957), 4.

used as a means of demonstration and protest. An analysis of the women's songs, which are almost limitless, can reveal an important part of the woman reformer's character and add further to our total search for the American character.

John Steinbeck once wrote:

Songs are the statement of a people. You can learn more about people by listening to their songs than any other way, for into the songs go all the hopes and hurts, the angers, fears, the wants and aspirations.⁵¹

This was literally true of the songs of the women reformers after the Civil War, for we have no record of any being composed before 1865. By 1869, suffrage was already recognized as the primary goal of the feminists, and a chief method of advertising the aim, was song. Throughout the numerous suffrage songs were many themes which were constantly reiterated. By isolating these themes we can obtain a clearer picture of the woman's pattern.

"Protest songs" can be used as the general classification of the lyrics of the woman reformer. A definition of such a category provides us with a

⁵¹John Greenway, American Folksongs of Protest (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc., 1953), Preface, p. vii.

first insight to the importance of these folksongs.

These are the struggle songs of the people. They are outbursts of bitterness, of hatred for the oppressor, of determination to endure hardships together and to fight for a better life. Whether they are ballads composed and sung by an individual or rousing songs improvised on the picket line, they are imbued with the feeling of communality, or togetherness. They are songs of unity . . . ⁵²

This last sentence is pivotal: cohesiveness, or unity, was the primary purpose of the songs. In a reform movement marked by the rise of many different women's groups and the accompanying petty differences, a common denominator was needed, and song provided one of these. Most of the themes employed were agreeable to most of the feminists.

A first common theme, and a favorite among the women, was the positive contribution to society which they could effect with equality. An overly optimistic and exuberant view of woman's power with the vote is expressed in "The Suffrage Fläg."

.
This band is for all reforms, war shall be at
an end,
Bayonets and swords shall rust, we'll use the
brain, the pen.
Laden with precious freight now thunders on
the progress car,

⁵²Ibid., p. 10.

At the headlight waves the suffrage flag that
bears the woman's star.

Thus evolves the greatest triumph of dual
human race--

Church, and State, the home and school, and
law and love embrace.

We'll have a perfect nation, we'll march from
near and far

To glory 'neath the Stars and Stripes--it
shall bear the woman's star.

53

Sung to the tune of "Bonnie Blue Flag," the emotional
appeal is evident. Yet the songs were obviously over-
stated and idealistic--nevertheless, necessities for
a reform. Charlotte Perkins Gilman used the same
approach in her Suffrage Songs and Verses. By arguing
from practical steps in a more prosaic approach, Mrs.
Gilman hoped for the vote.

Song for Equal Suffrage

Not for self but larger service has our cry
for freedom grown.

There is crime, disease and warfare in a
world of men alone,

In the name of love we're rising now to serve
and save our own,

As Peace comes marching on!

We will help to make a pruning hook of every
outgrown sword,

We will help to knit the nations in continu-
ing accord,

⁵³Folkways Records, FH 5281: Songs of the Suffragettes. Words: William P. Adkinson. Music: "Bonnie Blue Flag."

In humanity made perfect is the glory of the
 Lord,
 As His World goes marching on!⁵⁴

It was assumed that none of the evils of the world would exist if woman was equal to man. Furthermore, there is a connotation of motherhood or mother love in the words used: positively, "larger service," "love," "serve," "save," "knit," and negatively, "crime," "disease," and "warfare." Not only would woman vote, but more importantly, mother would vote, and with her "virtues" could effect the "joy and peace of mother's world."⁵⁵ Here in an early day "momism"⁵⁶ is a second important theme of the feminist's songs.

Probably no word conjures up more positive emotion than mother, and when combined with melodramatic expressions and music, it becomes irresistible. The suffragettes apparently had this early psychological insight and employed it well as in "Give the Ballots to the Mothers,"⁵⁷ and "The New America."

⁵⁴Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Suffrage Songs and Verses (New York: The Charlton Co., 1911), pp. 22-23.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Philip Wylie, Generation of Vipers (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1966), 9th printing, used the term which will be discussed later.

⁵⁷Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: Rebecca N. Hazard. Music: "Marching Through Georgia."

In the latter is found this impassioned plea:

.....
 Sons, will you longer see,
 Mothers on bended knee
 For justice pray?
 Rise now, in manhood's might,
 With earth's great souls unite,
 To speed the dawning light
 Of freedom's day.⁵⁸

In the mother-son relationship, so the argument implied, what loving offspring would deny his mother anything, especially the vote? Carried a step further, this theme from motherhood could be even more efficacious with words connoting sacrifice:

Oh, Dear, What Can the Matter Be?

.....
 Women have reared all the sons of the brave,
 Women have shared in the burdens they gave,
 Women have labored your country to save,
 That's why we're wanting to vote!⁵⁹

and again,

The New Battle Hymn

.....
 We have sent our best beloved forth to battle
 for right
 We have watched beside the wounded through
 the sad and solemn night
 We have given of our solace, brothers, give

⁵⁸Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: Elizabeth Boynton Herbert. Music: "America."

⁵⁹Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: L. May Wheeler.

us of your might
And God will lead us on.⁶⁰

From the image of motherhood, to the child relationship, and finally to the sacrifice involved, the songs became increasingly emotional and successful. Again, the portrait of a martyr resulted. The woman reformer recognized the image and continued the expression even to the marrying of Uncle Sam, a seeming ultimate.

Uncle Sam's Wedding

When Uncle Sam set up his house,
He welcomed every brother,
But in the haste of his new life,
He quite forgot his mother.

Uncle Sam is long in years
And he is growing wiser;
He now can see 'twas a mistake
To have no Miss-advisor.

Now we're here dear Uncle Sam
To help you in your trouble;
And the first thing best to do
Is making you a double.

Yankee Doodle will be glad
To join with us in spreading
The news abroad o'er all the land
Of Uncle Sam's great wedding.⁶¹

⁶⁰Written for the Bishop Prize, 1909, by Julia Mills Dunn. Located in the Garrison Family Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

⁶¹Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: L. May Wheeler. Music: "Yankee Doodle."

"Mother" was now a national symbol, and not to be denied.

Another favorite theme in the women's songs was temperance. As a reform it provided the ideal setting for a melodramatic presentation of woman's argument. In speech after speech and through journals and magazines, Demon Rum was constantly pictured as destroying a home, breaking-up a family, and generally causing havoc to the "woman's domain." Through song this "devastation" by liquor could be presented in a more forceful manner with greater cohesiveness. Of the many songs written on a temperance theme, "Father's a Drunkard and Mother is Dead," was probably the most popular and certainly the most dramatic. The whole song must be read to understand the point of view.

Father's a Drunkard and Mother is Dead

ONE DISMAL, STORMY NIGHT IN WINTER, A LITTLE GIRL--BAREFOOTED AND MISERABLY CLAD--LEANED SHIVERING AGAINST A LARGE TREE NEAR THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE. "SISSIE," SAID THE PASSING STRANGER, "WHY DON'T YOU GO HOME?" SHE RAISED HER PALE FACE AND WITH TEARS DIMMING HER SWEET BLUE EYES, ANSWERED MOURNFULLY, "I HAVE NO HOME. FATHER'S A DRUNKARD, AND MOTHER IS DEAD."

I

Out in the gloomy night, sadly I roam,
I have no mother dear, no pleasant home;
Nobody cares for me, no one would cry
Even if poor little Bessie should die.

Barefoot and tired, I've wandered all day,
 Asking for work but I'm too small they say;
 On the damp ground I must now lay my head--
 Father's a Drunkard, and Mother is dead!

Chorus

Mother, oh! why did you leave me alone,
 With no one to love me, no friends and no home?
 Dark is the night, and the storm rages wild,
 God pity Bessie, the Drunkard's lone child.

II

We were so happy till Father drank rum,
 Then all our sorrow and trouble begun;
 Mother grew paler, and wept every day,
 Baby and I were too hungry to play.
 Slowly they faded, and one Summer's night
 Found their dear faces all silent and white;
 Then with big tears slowly dropping, I said:
 "Father's a Drunkard, and Mother is dead!"

III

Oh! if the "Temp'rance men" ~~only~~ could find
 Poor, wretched Father, and talk very kind--
 If they could stop him from drinking--why then
 I should be so very happy again!
 Is it too late? "Men of Tem'rance," please try,
 Or poor little Bessie may soon starve and die.
 All the day long I've been begging for bread--
 "Father's a Drunkard, and Mother is dead!"⁶²

Notice the connotative words used in the song: all attempt to evoke pity and compassion in the listener. Furthermore, the theme of mother and home is added--joined with temperance, an exceptionally appealing song results. To women, this tear-jerker was considered a success.

⁶²Clifton J. Furness, The Genteel Female: An Anthology (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), p. 97.

What has been called "inspirational,"⁶³ provides another theme to the women's songs. In actuality, inspiration meant patriotism, as in the ideology discussed. Women considered themselves as bearers of the American tradition for freedom and justice as set forth in the Declaration of Independence and various famous slogans. Songs with such a theme are legion and two will suffice for our purposes. "The Taxation Tyranny" employs a famous Revolutionary cry and applies it to woman's plight.

The Taxation Tyranny

To tax one who's not represented
Is tyranny--tell if you can
Why women should not have the ballot?
She's taxed just the same as a man.
King George, you remember, denied us
The ballot, but sent us the tea.
And we, without asking a question,
Just tumbled it into the sea.

Chorus

Then to justice let's ever be true,
To each citizen render his due.
Equal rights and protection forever
To all 'neath the Red, White and Blue!

That one man shall not rule another,
Unless by that other's consent,
Is the principle deep underlying
The framework of this government.
So, as woman is punished for breaking
The laws which she cannot gainsay,

⁶³Silber, op. cit., p. 8.

Let us give her a voice in the making,
Or ask her no more to obey.⁶⁴

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are even considered in the poem, and all is viewed under the Flag--the American nation's sacramental.

In "Columbia's Daughters," "freedom," "liberty," "justice," "free," and "starry banner" are all used successfully in a try for a second American Revolution.

Columbia's Daughters

.....

Think it not an idle murmur,
You who hear the cry;
'Tis a plea for human freedom
Hallowed liberty!

O our country, glorious nation,
Greatest of them all!
Give unto thy daughters justice,
Or their pride will fall.

Great Republic! to thy watchword
Wouldst thou faithful be,
All beneath thy starry banner
Must alike be free.

Chorus

Raise the flag and plant the standard,
Wave the signal still;
Brothers, we must share your freedom,
Help us and we will.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: General E. Estabrook. Music: "The Red, White, and Blue."

⁶⁵Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: Harriet H. Robinson. Music: "Hold the Fort."

These words are actually paraphrases of the July 4th Declaration and connotatively packed with emotion. Coupled with the stirring music, like "Red, White, and Blue," and "Hold the Fort," this theme of patriotism, when understood, was powerful in its sway. Emotion was necessary to several women's reforms and could no better be achieved than through patriotic pleas.

A phrase, in various expressions, which created much discussion throughout the women's rights movement, was "keep woman in her sphere." To most, "sphere" related to home, mother, wife, and the duties therein, and women must be kept there. After all, as the argument was stated, woman possessed all the virtues implying delicacy, sweetness, modesty, etc.; these would be violated in the cruel world. The feminists, however, considered "sphere" as equal to man's and argued from the resultant meanings. From such discussions, the woman became stereotyped as varieties of a "battleax" and perpetuated the image through song. For both sides of the "sphere" question were put into lyrics and became a constant theme.

The woman quietly began the argument by answering man's flattery concerning her virtues:

Going to the Polls

.....
 If we're angels, as they tell us,
 Can we once suppose
 That all men would frown on us
 When going to the polls?⁶⁶

She continued by directly confronting the "keep woman in her sphere" phrase.

Keep Woman in Her Sphere

I have a neighbor, one of those
 Not very hard to find,
 Who know it all without debate
 And never change their mind.
 I asked him "What of woman's rights?"
 He said in tones severe--
 "My mind on that is all made up,
 Keep woman in her sphere."

I saw a man in tattered garb
 Forth from the grog-shop come;
 He squandered all his cash for drink,
 And starved his wife at home;
 I asked him "Should not woman vote?"
 He answered with a sneer--
 "I've taught my wife to know her place,
 Keep woman in her sphere."

I met an earnest, thoughtful man,
 Not many days ago,
 Who pondered deep all human law
 The honest truth to know;
 I asked him "What of woman's cause?"
 The answer came sincere--
 "Her rights are just the same as mine,
 Let woman choose her sphere."⁶⁷

⁶⁶Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words:
 Julia B. Nelson. Music: "Coming Thro' the Rye."

⁶⁷Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words:
 D. Estabrook. Music: "Auld Lang Syne."

Notice that the first man is narrow-minded, stubborn, and severe, and the second is a drunkard, and thus completely worthless: both opposed woman. The third man, however, is earnest and thoughtful and on woman's side. Here is a clear example in a reform movement where the reformer, herself, can present her own image in a desirable manner as good propaganda.

The next step was an angry, direct confrontation with the problem: the embattled feminist:

Let Us All Speak Our Minds

.....

For we know it's all fudge to say man's the
best judge
Of what should be and shouldn't, and so on.
That woman should bow, nor attempt to say how
She considers that matters should go on.
I never yet gave up myself thus a slave,
However my husband might try for it;
For I can't and I won't and I shan't and I
don't,
But I will speak my mind if I die for it.⁶⁸

No longer was man's flattery efficacious and woman's self-image beneficial. An initiative was needed to further the cause against man "trifling with the rights of sex."⁶⁹ Woman, when mad enough, could do this and

⁶⁸Songs of the Suffragettes, op. cit. Words: William Brough. Music: J. G. Maeder.

⁶⁹Ibid.

was encouraged in the attempt.⁷⁰ Song provided one method.

A final theme of the feminist songs was not really important. As in the absurdities of the ideology, nonsense also crept into the lyrics and effected nothing. Merely consider one.

He wants to know what Woman's Suffrage means:
And so He comes to me, he says, to learn.
I've tried to make it plain to Him, in turn,
How it would break political machines
And put an end to all disgraceful scenes
About the polls. He really seems to yearn
For knowledge, and His eyes with fervor burn--
And--my! He says He loves my pork and beans.

He says He sees He made a great mistake--
He never will oppose the Cause again!
And then He asked me for a piece of cake--
He says my cooking would make slaves of men!
He says we women really ought to vary
Our plan of fight--and make it culinary!⁷¹

Such an attempt serves only to show the extent to which women were prepared to go in their search for equality. It is difficult to assess the value of such "sonnets" in review, but many were published in books, widely distributed, and thus, known. Such lyrics cannot be dismissed altogether, but their importance is

⁷⁰Many of Mrs. Gilman's verses and songs are in this vein: encouragement and the "never give up" attitude.

⁷¹Berton Braley, Sonnets of a Suffragette (Chicago: Browne and Howell Co., 1913), no page.

diminished by their stale humor. Fortunately, more revealing themes are included in feminist songs.

Cartoons

A third adjunct of the woman's rights movement is cartoons. In many ways, this is the most enjoyable and interesting approach. Again, it was not an essential to a victory for feminists but it aided the cause as another means for the women's argument to be propagated. Here, too, suffrage became the primary goal for attack, and the argument that woman's vote would change all the existing evils was nowhere better presented than in these cartoons.

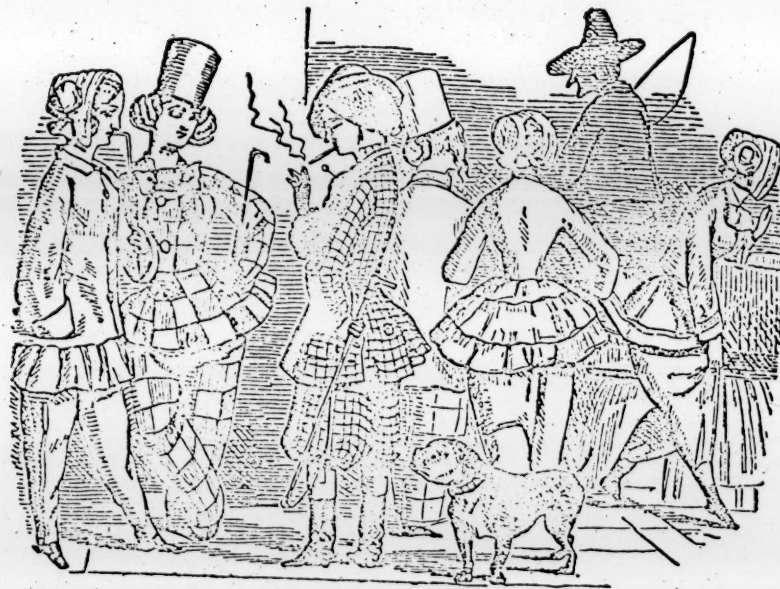
Two approaches are immediately recognizable in these editorial pictures: (1) the woman represented by some "anti"; and (2) the feminist depicting herself. The latter is more important for our purposes of character study, but it is based on the former. The woman reformer, seeing herself through another's eyes, was able to react positively, and present the image she herself desired. However, she must recognize what she disliked, and most often this was the pose of women becoming masculine, or its variant, renouncing feminine virtues. Coupled with this masculine portrait

was the deceptive concern by men that woman was losing her uniqueness or femininity by hoping for an equality. It was an inverse flattery that failed with the woman reformer, but allowed her a starting point for her own successful cartoons. Any attempt to describe fully the cartoons here presented would defeat the purpose of such illustrations. They were originally designed to present an argument without expressing it; a narration would be redundant.

Humor or satire is often the object in editorial cartoons. By showing a person or a group how ridiculous their position was, or is, perhaps they would change. This became a major concern in woman's depiction by man, and a direct catalyst to woman's self-image. Almost always, in such a category, "ladies were shown usurping one or another masculine prerogative."⁷² A typical example is "Woman's Emancipation." (Figure 22)⁷³ Smoking cigars, carrying whips, wearing mannish boots, pants, and hats, and even walking a bulldog, the portrayal is obviously the birth of a

⁷²Thorp, op. cit., p. 127.

⁷³Taken from Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle, The Women's Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 83.



Woman's Emancipation

Fig. 22

"new man." The cartoon is clearly overstated and overdrawn, but humorously exaggerated to depict a result of woman's equality. Similarly, the change in women was transferred to children (Figure 23)⁷⁴ who assumed all the poses of their parents: the embattled feminist on a soap box speaking to her peers "playing house," or assuming woman's sphere, while the budding anti-feminist is off to the side scoffing. The direct masculine approaches went unheeded by women, so a third method was tried. (Figure 23) By appealing to woman's vanity, perhaps the "anti" might be successful. It was a hollow kind of approach and not easily believed. The loss of femininity was implied, and woman's pride was struck, but in the wrong manner. It was an easy step from such masculine portrayals to a feminine initiative, and self-awareness. Women depicted as men resulted in a distasteful image to the feminists, and was completely reversed in a forthright denial. Men became the personification of all that is evil in society (Figure 24) and woman, in flowing robes, reminiscent of justice and freedom, was the final

⁷⁴This, and every cartoon following, was taken from the fine collection in the Sophia Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

FLATTERING!



WOMEN VOTERS
WOULD NOT
BE ACCORDED
PROPER
TREATMENT
AT THE
POLLS
BY THE
MEN VOTERS



"Goils aint vot they uster be."



Fig. 23

ENOUGH SAID



WOMAN'S PLACE



Fig. 24

answer to a corrupted humanity. It was a directly feminine appeal, as was "Woman's Place." (Figure 24) With equality, woman would take her place with man and her children (notice the mother role) in the upward struggle of society. There would be no feminine domination as seen by the "anti," but an equal and compatible struggle. Moreover, in the clear "black and white" of a good melodrama, woman contrasted herself with man. (Figure 25) Here was the sweetness and purity of motherhood, goodness personified versus the drunkenness of man (labelled "this"), and the former was considered inferior! This is the pose which the feminist desired. From a masculine public image the woman reformer in cartoon was reversed, and sentiment, not humor, was the catalyst. Here again, is the same theme so often used by the feminist in her other appeals.

Patriotism, another constant used in song and ideology, was also used as a theme in the editorial cartoon. All the speeches, centered on familiar slogans, the Declaration of Independence, and Uncle Sam as honored symbols, are condensed in the pictures here presented. (Figures 26-28) Again, the woman was identifying herself with American tradition, and

YESTERDAY — AND — TODAY IN NEW JERSEY

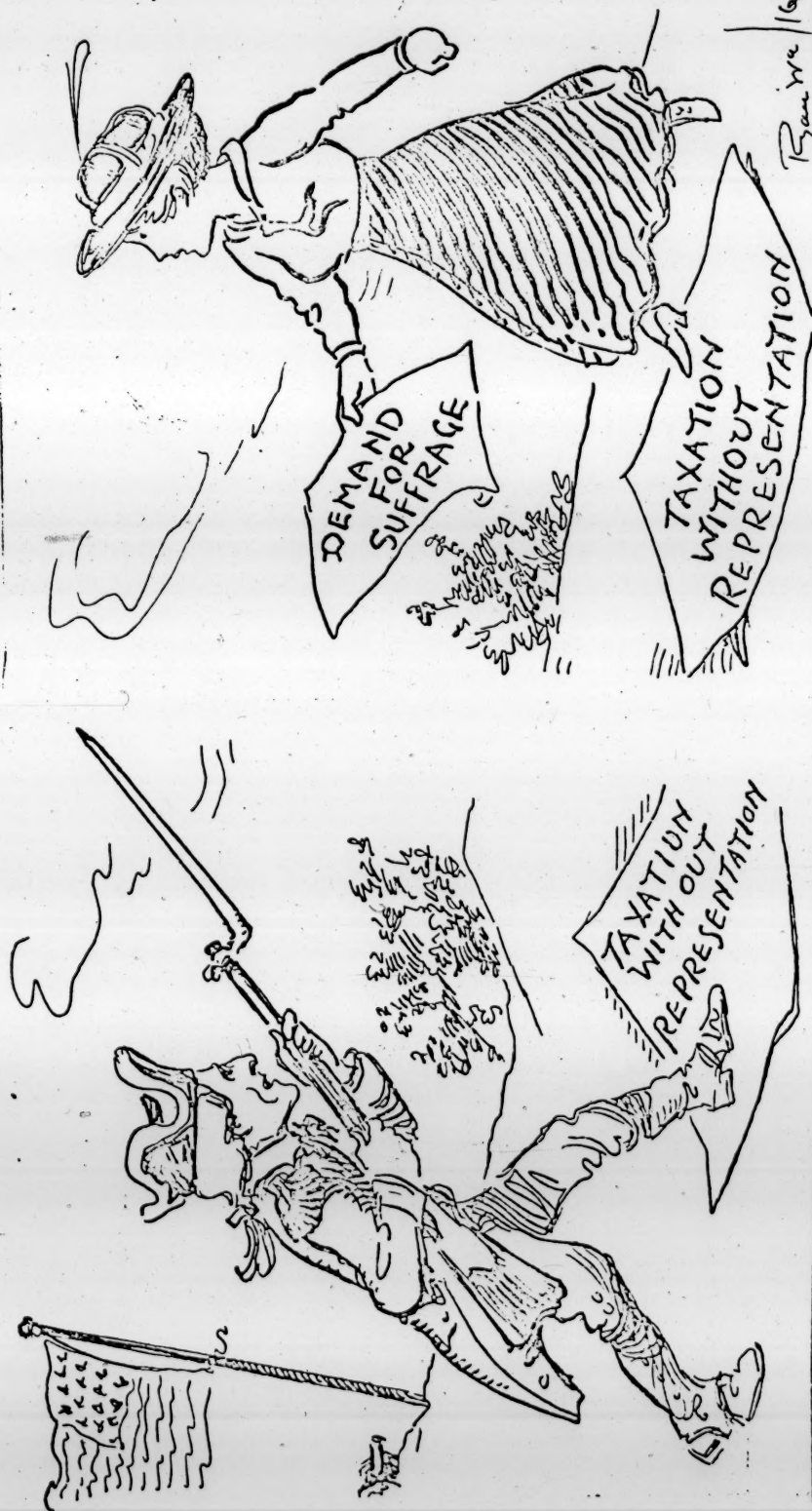


Fig. 26



"RING OUT THE OLD
RING IN THE NEW
RING OUT THE FALSE
RING IN THE TRUE"

Fig. 27



"HERE COMES THE BRIDE."

Fig. 28

demanding her equal place on such grounds. She was not mannish but feminine, and, a step further, an American, and should not be denied the vote.

She was, however, discriminated against, especially in suffrage, and no other way was open, than to dramatize this. Here is the most clear example of the American woman reformer assuming martyrdom. (Figures 29-31) Various positions of bondage were dramatized in the most heart-rending poses. She was immobile (unable to vote) in the stocks, with prejudice and injustice (of men) holding the keys to the locks; or she was manacled by Uncle Sam and pleading to be released in her most sorrowing expression, with Justice arguing her case, and ironically, dressed as a woman; or she was struggling under the world's mighty chain of inequality which could only be broken with the "lightning" power of suffrage. Woman was clearly the victim, in a "feel-sorry-for-herself" kind of image, a negative love.

Not trusting that such a pose would prove efficacious, however, the woman used a positive approach of mother love. She could do many more difficult things as the "mother" of society, but nothing as simple as voting to keep the mother image sacred.

SET HER FREE.

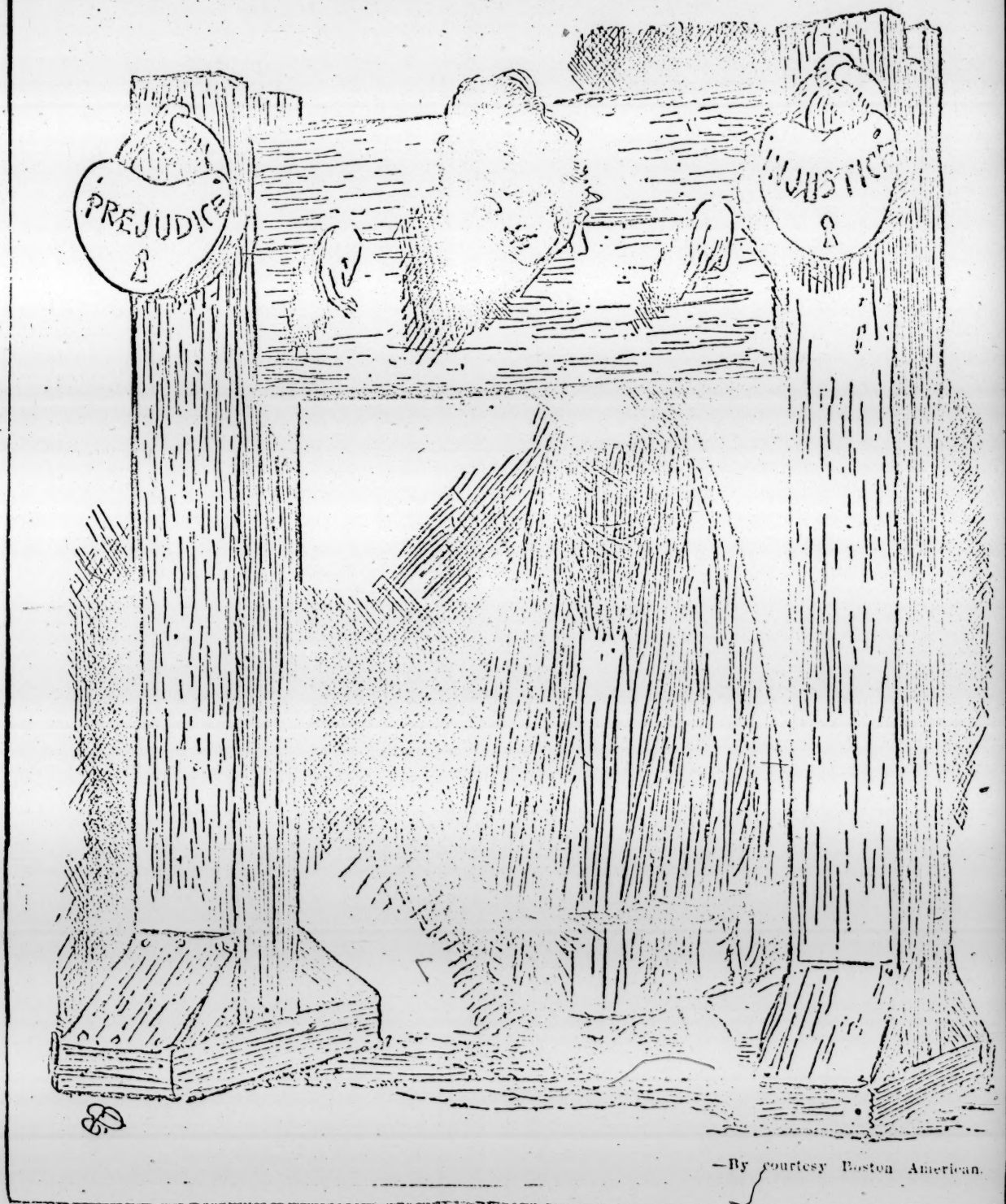


Fig. 29

A GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE
BY THE PEOPLE FOR THE PEOPLE.



ARE NOT THE WOMEN HALF THE NATION?

Fig. 30

SHATTERING THE CHAIN

Copyright, 1918, International News Service.



Fig. 31

(Figure 32) More clearly still, in a symbolic pose (Figure 33) with apron and disheveled hair, baking bread and smiling, connoting a relentless energy, and a willingness to sacrifice, the woman as mother becomes the American queen with the caption, "She Deserves It!" The crown of equality is placed on her head by the sex which can make her coronation complete: male voters. Motherhood, a woman's unique role, becomes the final plea of the feminists, and a reversal from the masculine pose in which cartoons began.

The final cartoon here presented (Figure 34) is the whole women's rights movement in illustration. Each rung of the ladder represents a feminist reform, with several successfully attained, after very hard struggles against ignorance and greed. Suffrage, as usual, is almost the final "rung" and ultimate goal to the sunny realm of progress. Injustice and prejudice, the ever-present devils, symbolize the enemies not easily defeated in just battles. Similarly, as suffrage was not the desired panacea in the actual women's rights movement, so it is not depicted as the last rung in the cartoon. Identity could be substituted for "true democracy," and be more accurate in the woman's continuing reforms.

WOMEN CAN DO

THIS



AND THIS



AND THIS



AND THIS



AND THIS



BUT NOT THIS



Fig. 32



SHE DESERVES IT!

Fig. 33

THE NEXT RUNG



Fig. 34

In conclusion, the cartoons presented here are self-explanatory, as they should be. The themes employed were not new or startling, but familiar and dramatic. What an ideology could not often express a cartoon did, sometimes in a more forceful way. If nothing resulted, the attempt was at least made to hasten woman's equality.

Drama

A fourth and final complement to the woman's rights movement is drama. Indeed, it was not employed as an ideology to the reform, as can be argued for cartoons and perhaps, songs. Yet most of the drama was written in retrospect and it is in this historical aspect where the value lies. Were the feminists and the movement itself presented in an accurate manner? Were stories plausible? Can more be learned about the movement from reading these plays? If one can answer "yes" to these and other questions, we have good historical drama. Yet, for the purposes of our study, woman's character, the play might be poor history, but interesting commentary on the feminist. Several will be discussed from these viewpoints, and no attempt made to be exhaustive.

Miss Hobbs, and Aunt Ellen, are two plays representing the stereotype of a feminist. Both ladies are unmarried, men-haters, and not content with woman's position, especially those in the married state. The favorite battle of the sexes is the resultant theme. Naturally, both plays end on a happy note, men nor marriage are bad, and quite good for some, even the adamant Miss Hobbs. Amidst the feeble story-line are several bits of dialogue which are quite good in forming a picture of a feminist. In Miss Hobbs, Percival describes the woman reformer:

I know her. Big nose, pasty complexion, thin hair and a voice like a penny trumpet.⁷⁵

This is not far removed from the newspaper accounts of the day,⁷⁶ and indeed, believed by many. In the same play, the theme of male dominance is often discussed. One such way is forcefully presented by Miss Hobbs:

Beula: Oh, I'm so tired of the wickedness of man.

Miss H.: The world is beginning to be tired of it--at last.

Miss Farey: Do you really think they are so very bad?

⁷⁵Jerome K. Jerome, Miss Hobbs, a comedy in four acts (New York: T. H. French Publisher, 1902), p. 20.

⁷⁶Robert E. Riegel, American Feminists (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1963), discusses this point in Chapter X, p. 192.

Miss H.: My dear child, what do you see around you? What do you read: Every book you take up. Do you think these women imagine the men they draw? They have lived with them--suffered from them.

Miss F.: But perhaps they can't help being bad.

Miss H.: That's another question.

Miss F.: Then oughtn't we to be sorry for them rather to try and help them.

Miss H.: Many woman has said that to her ruin. The tiger cannot help his nature, would you take him into your arms to try and improve him? . . . I don't say we're saints. Heaven knows we have our faults. But they are not men's faults.⁷⁷

Here is a strong claim for feminine superiority, beyond a search for equality. In the play, as in actuality, it was not successful. In fact, if marriage is considered male dominance, Miss Hobbs loses in her consent to marry Mr. Wolff.

Aunt Ellen is a similar play in the characterization of the heroine, but here the dominant theme of man versus woman is tempered by the topic of woman's intellectual inferiority. This is obviously the viewpoint of an anti-suffragist and a man.

Women aren't intended to deal with abstract questions.⁷⁸

and again, the deceptive flattery,

⁷⁷Jerome, op. cit., p. 24.

⁷⁸Aunt Ellen, with no author or date, was found in handwritten form in the Schlesinger Library, at Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, p. 9.

Do you suppose I want to see my wife at the polls with all sorts of men?⁷⁹

The same "anti" argued that woman was too emotional and thus unable to operate in a man's world:

But after all, you must admit that there is some truth in the idea that man is the intellectual force in the world whereas woman is mainly emotional.⁸⁰

and,

Women are all nerves. . . . They just break down and go to pieces.⁸¹

This was, of course, a feeble argument and achieved no results. The "anti" ideology was, nevertheless, dramatized, and in the supposed criterion for a good feminist play, the woman reformer was successful in the end.

Another aspect of the woman's movement was suffrage, which is well depicted in the play, Strange Bedfellows. Set in San Francisco in 1896, the story deals with the problems of women acquiring the vote, and organized by a feminist member of a strict anti-suffrage Senator's family. Even to the teenagers, the sexes are lined up for battle, and nothing is considered foul in the ensuing fight. Senator Cromwell

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 23.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 11.

leads the male faction with unbounded exuberance, as when he calls the women "feather-brained flibbertigibbets,"⁸² and orates profusely with Biblical-like authority:

In dealing with women, you must never lose sight of the basic scientific facts. From the beginning of time, with the emergence of the first vertebrate from the primordial ooze, the female of the species was doomed to subjection by the male. She is happier in that state than she would be in any other, because it is her nature.⁸³

His daughter-in-law, Clarissa, leads the opposition and retaliates with equal Homeric-like vengeance:

He who plots against the cause of women--may the gods overwhelm him!⁸⁴

It is difficult to assess the vehemence of such struggles, but the historical accuracy of Strange Bedfellows is present, even to the wearing of the omnipresent yellow ribbons. Such correctness makes for enjoyable reading, albeit, after the fact. Yet the importance of such retrospection can be applied to a continuing women's reform movement.

Biographical plays represent another form of historical feminist drama. These are usually plays of

⁸²Florence Ryerson and Colin Clements, Strange Bedfellows, a comedy in three acts (New York: Samuel French, 1945); p. 16.

⁸³Ibid., p. 45.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 200.

some woman reformer who was known for some one thing, as The Portrait of Mrs. W. concerns Mary Wollstonecraft and her early feminist leanings; another is Lucy Stone.⁸⁵ The latter is a good example of such portraits in drama, and also fairly accurate. Robert Finch researched the subject and makes special notice of the wedding of Lucy Stone where she refused to change her name to Blackwell. This was the highlight in the life of a leading feminist, and the author surely emphasizes it. In many parts, the sentiment becomes thick, and near the end, borders on maudlinism with every "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!" Such drama serves to add inspiration to succeeding feminists to continue the pioneer pose assumed by Lucy Stone.

The rights of a married woman serves as another theme of feminist drama. A catalogue of such productions would prove tedious and redundant, for the problem was an early catalyst to the whole of the women's rights movements and since then, a continuing discussion. The various expressions and problems in the many plays on the subject can be capsuled simply and

⁸⁵Lucy Stone, an adaptation by Robert Finch of a play by Maud Wood Park. Located in the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

accurately in a few sentences uttered by Mrs. Dawson in Nowadays.

The more I think of married men, the more I wonder why God made so many fools. If they'd only treat us like human beings instead of something they own! They are all alike.⁸⁶

All are variants of this same statement and partially unsolved to the present day.

In the discussion on drama no attempt was made to be complete. To be sure, many more feminist plays were written than here discussed. Our primary interest is historical in a search for the woman's character. Whether written for inspiration, history, or propaganda, it was seen that some plays do conform to the traditional arguments used by women reformers, and add nothing unusual to an overall study. If anything, they allow for more dramatics in an already demonstrative and emotional reformer.

It only remains for us to discover, in another chapter, the American woman's character from such reform adjuncts.

⁸⁶George Middleton, Nowadays, a contemporary comedy (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1914), p. 170.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN REFORMER:

HER CHARACTER

Reform is a good index to character. Whether boisterous or subtle, great or small, the motives and results of a social movement can be very revealing in any attempt to discover the "mind" involved. Inherent are many difficulties of retrospection and problems of analyses resulting from the confusion of various interpretations. With the reforms centered about the American woman, the problems are compounded. Before the reforms for women's rights were begun, woman could not define her goal, and even after the suffrage was achieved, a definition was impossible. An obvious conclusion is that the reforming did not stop, either because the woman did not know her goal, or more importantly, herself. For it was primarily after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment when this dilemma became apparent. The suffrage for women was not the expected panacea. More confusion resulted, and the

woman as reformer continued. Here, the analyses of the problem gathered strength, and women's character became the experiment. Briefly, and simply, the problem can be stated: What is the woman reformer? From the complex investigations to the simple studies, a consideration of the woman reformer's character can be discussed. Character here will be used in its broadest sense: the estimate, description, or delineation of the traits or qualities put upon the woman reformer or those conferring individuality or distinctiveness.

In a lecture read before the woman's rights convention in Boston, 1855, Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "Women are . . . the civilizers of mankind. What is civilization? I answer, the power of good women."¹ In broad terms, this is a premature approach to woman's position in society and an early clue to her character. Ideally, the woman should civilize mankind, and could through social influence, effect a better society. Yet in 1855, the American women's position was ambig-

¹Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Woman," A Lecture Read before the Woman's Rights Convention, Boston, September 20, 1855, in The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Miscellanies, Vol. XI (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Company, The Riverside Press, 1878), p. 409.

uous and only in the early stages of reform. The "power" would have to come from some kind of equality, through some kind of agitation, to cause some kind of position in "civilization." An idealistic starting point, this "power of good women" used a practical approach for several years, but came out equally idealistic, and equally inefficacious. One of the practical measures can be termed the whole feminist movement.

Knowing the goal, variously expressed as "equality," the woman reformer attempted many useful movements to achieve it. Looking back at the efforts, many have interpreted these feminist crusades to be the direct cause for woman's ambiguous position in recent times. "Masculine aptitudes and masculine goals,"² were praised until women began to feel them to be the ideal search, irrespective of certain duties of their own sex. This resulted in a complete reversal of roles for some, and the presentation of "woman" as a sort of "sexless creature."³ A facetious

²Mirra Komarovsky, Women in the Modern World: Their Education and Their Dilemma (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), p. vii.

⁴Viola Klein, The Feminine Character, History of an Ideology (New York: International Universities Press, 1949), p. 24.

definition of a feminist further implied this loss of sex: "One who has ceased to be a lady and not yet become a gentleman."⁴ This whole preoccupation with emulating men and envying their status has resulted in a "mystique,"⁵ which, rooted in such a tradition, cannot easily be broken.

It should be noted that the woman's position was not unusual. A group considered inferior in society, naturally, looks to the accepted people and attempts to imitate their actions. However, with the American woman, the movement began on a somewhat different premise and had to operate under prejudice, tradition, and custom. A similarity with man was originally, and wrongly, stressed. Yet from such a starting point, several developments could occur, and

⁴John Henry Cutler, What About Women? (New York: Ives Washburn, Inc., 1961), p. 171.

⁵Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1963), uses the term throughout her work. The envy of men is bitterly viewed as a feminine mistake and the problem giving rise to women's present ambiguous position: "The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love. . . . They must keep on having babies, because the feminine mystique says there is no other way for a woman to be a heroine." pp. 37-39.

several directions taken. Viewed as after-the-fact, alternatives with various divisions presented themselves. Positively and optimistically, one can view the feminist movement as a repressed desire on the part of the women to show their superiority⁶ to men. They saw what man could do, and wanted to copy him, but always hoping to do better, "an underlying drive to excel."⁷ Successful or not, and no matter how flag-waving it may sound, the woman upheld "a courage"⁸ in the face of imminent defeat. This became a decided trait which accompanied the woman in all her reforms. Negatively and pessimistically, however, considering the inauspicious beginning of the rights' movement, the woman has been cast in a deeper mold of alternatives and indecision. Here the terminology becomes involved: on one side of the resultant triangle is

⁶Robert E. Riegel, American Feminists (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1963), argues in part from this viewpoint.

⁷Ibid., p. 200.

⁸Adrienne Koch, "Two Cheers for Equality," in Seymour M. Farber (ed.), Man and Civilization: The Potential of Woman, A Symposium, Held at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), discusses this characteristic and compares the woman reformer to the "American colonial woman and the later sisters on the frontier." p. 207.

the "false chivalry of men which masked subconscious conservatism and selfishness."⁹ Insincerely, they catered to women because they feared her equality, and consciously believed in her inferiority. On a second side, is the admission, in the failure of the masculine pose, that a woman's "special duties" cannot be exhibited in a public setting. One writer has called this the "vicious alternative: Marriage OR career."¹⁰ The third side of the problem is the difficult admission on woman's part that man must share in a woman's life--the pose of the "eternal feminine" results with its constant concern for the "care of life."¹¹ These three postures form the basis of the woman reformer's character. She had to begin from such indefinite sources that a clear-cut solution was difficult even before the plans could be administered. This first part of the woman reformer's character

⁹Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, Vol. I: Fruits of Manifest Destiny, 1847-1852 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), p. 131.

¹⁰Florence Rockwood Kluckhohn, "American Women and American Values," in Lyman Bryson (ed.), Facing the Future's Risks, Studies Toward Predicting the Unforeseen (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 188.

¹¹Mary Beard, On Understanding Women (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1931), concludes her study with this theory.

might be termed ambiguous¹²: with envy, courage, and resignation constituting the attitude and none being dominant.

The domestic component, that primary trait associated with woman's duties and woman's image, was, also, a source of confusion for the woman reformer. Such a chief characteristic should not have proved difficult, and should have been clearly understood, but applying it to a new social role caused trouble. The argument held that a woman should remember this role as primary, and keep out of the man's field in society. Some feminists, not concerned with contending with man, and hoping to succeed in their "domestic" role, rebutted the argument and added a trait to the woman reformer's character. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a prolific writer and intellectual among the feminists, implied this thinking in her Human Work:

The man elected himself to be sole producer, in the large social sense; and the woman was to be only a consumer, to depend on him for her maintenance and take what he gave her.

The position is acutely abnormal--quite opposite to the inherent nature of the

¹²Henry Steele Commager, "The Ambiguous American," New York Times Magazine, May 3, 1964, pp. 16+, uses this description for all Americans.

female. It is her instinct to give--not to take; ably to do, not feebly to be done for.¹³

Suggested here is the special quality of a woman which could be profitably applied to society, and similarly, a solution to woman's dilemma of defining her position. "To give" is the foundation of domesticity,¹⁴ or woman's job. However, this role can be achieved in several ways, and again, opposites result.

The classic and traditional role of woman is as mother. This is seen as her primary and special duty above all else. Any deviation from the normal is considered peculiar and not to be tolerated. Significantly, most of the early feminists were married and mothers, and consciously fought in another sphere. Immediately, from the beginnings of the women's rights

¹³Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Human Work (New York: McClure, Phillips, and Co., 1904), p. 314.

¹⁴Wilma Shore, Women Should Be Allowed, A Verbatim Report on the Imbroglio Between the Sexes (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1965), facetiously objects to this "domestic role" in another addition to the kind of literature being written on the position of woman in modern society: "Let us stop and look at Eve in the cool light of reason, and see what she did so terrible. Offered her husband a piece of fruit, that is all, and called down the whole sorry mess on her head. But society does not see anything funny in today's so-called psychological experts that keep advising women to cease competing in the manly fields of struggle and conflict and revert quietly back to her classical nutritive role. The classical nutritive role did not help Eve." p. 11.

movement, "the characteristic feminine conflict, between the divergent claims put forth by the domestic sphere on the one side, and the business sphere on the other,"¹⁵ began. However, the argument becomes more convoluted and intricate in the explanation. It was simple enough for society to recognize that the woman, as wife and mother, agitated for her rights, without foreseeing repercussions. It was another matter, however, to insist on different solutions as efficacious to a single problem: woman's position. Philip Wylie, in recent times, has discussed this domestic role of the woman in harsh and often exaggerated words. Labelling his theory "Momism," he begins with those early feminists who fought for rights in suffrage:

— In a preliminary test of strength, she also got the vote, and although politics never interested her (unless she was exceptionally naive, a hairy foghorn, or a size forty scorpion), the damage she forthwith did to society was so enormous and so rapid that even the best men lost track of things. Mom's first gracious presence at the ballot-box was roughly concomitant with the start toward a new all-time low in political scurviness, hoodlumism, gangsterism, labor strife, monopolistic thuggery, moral degeneration, civic corruption, smuggling, bribery, theft, murder, homosexuality, drunkenness, financial depression, chaos, and war. Note that.¹⁶

¹⁵Klein, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁶Philip Wylie, Generation of Vipers (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1966), 9th printing, p. 191.

Such language is not necessary to condemn woman for going out of her sphere. What he is actually protesting is the mixture of woman's "vicious alternative." Implied is the notion that men under a pseudo gallantry allowed woman to do this role changing and became indifferent at the results. By not giving his support, man silently consented to woman participating in his sphere, and in a superior attitude, waited for the inevitable. Consequently, the woman as "Mom," is placed in an area of respect, symbolically equal to the Flag and the Constitution. She is consistently honored and praised by all classes of men and willingly accepts the tribute:

Mom, however, does not merely quote Thomas Jefferson on modern topics: she is Thomas Jefferson. This removes her twice from sanity. Mom wraps herself in the mantle of every canny man and coward who has drilled with a musket on this continent and reproduced a line that zigzagged down to mom. In that cloak, together with the other miters, rings, scepters, and power symbols which she has swiped, she has become the American pope.¹⁷

An infallibility is suggested here and is not wholly understood. "Mom" is all--falsely praised--yet no equal. She is not "mom" as a voter or businessman, but only as a peculiar person in the wrong sphere.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 196.

More perplexity about the woman's position is added, and the study of her character compounded.

To the ambiguity of her first position is added this trait from domesticity. A stereotype is effected: hackneyed, overdone, and traditional. Moreover, it is the mold in which all women fit.¹⁸ Perhaps it was against this stereotype of womanhood which the feminists of the nineteenth century fought. Various called equality with suffrage, or a new position in society, or an identity, it was all a stereotype, and a constant burden. Placed in such a gilded cage, the American woman became afraid to accept a different position from the lofty "Mom" given to her with such flattery. Wrongly arguing that each successive reform would bring a permanent solution to her problem the woman reformer was caught in a frustrating bind. She did, in theory, gain freedom in many areas, but did not use the liberty or, more probably, was "psychically and socially caught in a society

¹⁸More than one commentator discusses this stereotype "aspect" of the woman's problem, but in different ways. Viola Klein, "The Stereotype of Femininity," Journal of Social Issues, VI, No. 3 (1950), 3-12, equates it with the semblance of youth as woman's main concern. Even Walter Lippmann, as reported in Klein's, The Feminine Character, op. cit., uses the term in applying it to all phases of woman's work.

still dominated by masculine power and standards. That is her dilemma."¹⁹ Experiencing this frustration from all sides, the woman developed a scrupulous mind in her reforming which became so acute she even doubted the wisdom of such movements:

What disturbs her most is a doubt that what she wants most is her rights. However important the legal and economic struggle, it has brought no ease to her unquiet spirit and her turmoil of mind, and so her heart is not in it.²⁰

The most important reforming battle now had to be fought on a personal basis, the "war within women's own hearts."²¹ To be sure, it was still this constant reform begun in Seneca Falls, but a new starting point was now admitted.

In all contests,²² with one side pitted against the other, and victory the desired object, there is always the "morning-after discussion" with the losers, concerning the reasons the loss occurred. Curiously,

¹⁹Max Lerner, America as a Civilization, Vol. II: Culture and Personality (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), p. 604.

²⁰Ibid., p. 605.

²¹Ibid., p. 608.

²²Lillie Devereux Blake actually uses this term in reference to the women's rights movement: Lillie Devereux Blake Collection in the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri, Journals, 1859-1908. Journal entry: 1871, December 31.

the answers for a successful campaign are given, authoritatively, in retrospect, and more often result in further confusion. The women's rights movement is a good example of this kind of discussion. Since the Nineteenth Amendment, and its actual failure, the modern woman has been constantly counseled as to the reason for her failure and what should be done about it. Most arguments are repetitious and worthless, and further confuse the matter. Some are sincere and constructive, however, and should be discussed for their contribution to a character study.

The basis of most recent encouragement to women is to "be yourself" and "develop your own individual personality." Indirectly, the plea is to discover the woman's character for a better and more accurate means of approach. Again, the beginning is idealistic, and perhaps too late to be effective, yet a possible introduction to another full-scale reform.

Ashley Montagu provided an anthropological discussion in his provocatively titled work, The Natural Superiority of Women. "Survival benefits"²³ is a good synonym for his definition of superiority,

²³Ashley Montagu, The Natural Superiority of Women (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 42.

and applying it to women's "conditioned (belief) that they are inferior to men,"²⁴ an alternative for women can be deduced and readily applied: "IT IS THE FUNCTION OF WOMEN TO TEACH MEN HOW TO BE HUMAN."²⁵ The negative and pessimistic approach is no longer the sole means to a discussion of woman's role. By applying the "genius of humanity"²⁶ to several areas where woman has been lacking influence, especially creativity,²⁷ a positive beginning is made to a new reform. According to Montagu, woman does have a proper place and function, and should, thus, no longer be concerned about her position. Moreover, this "teaching men to be human" can be applied in various ways, apart from, or even including, the stereotype of domesticity, and still be effective. Two facts must, however, be completely understood and applied.

²⁴Ibid., p. 23.

²⁵Ibid., p. 143.

²⁶Ibid., p. 149.

²⁷The problem of "no women Michaelangelos" concerns many people and is variously answered. Montagu's solution is typical: "(1) for the greater part of their history most fields of achievement have been closed to them [women]; (2) in fields in which women were admitted they were not permitted to enter on an equal footing with men; (3) or, having been admitted, they were not encouraged to excel, were actively discouraged, or were not noticed at all." p. 128.

In the first place, women must learn to respect themselves as women, and not to think of themselves, any longer than is necessary, as pale and submissive echoes of their alter egos.

In the second place, women must assume the obligation of fulfilling their responsibilities, not as subjects of men, but as equally important if not the most important, members of the community of humanity.²⁸

It will be noticed that the plea is not really new, but the basis in "humanity" is. More importantly, however, it is untried and flexible--worthy of a new attempt at reform and potential success. A guidepost was finally given to women, albeit as after-the-fact, if they would, in a much larger sense, heed the warning.

Others concerned with the position of the woman in American society had similar analyses about her ordeal. The major differences came in approaches and terminology. Florence Kluckhohn suggested a change in society's attitude toward domestic tasks, "which would accord them a worth which challenges women to creative accomplishments."²⁹ Here is an attack on the stereotype trait of the American woman's character, and all, not merely woman, must work to

²⁸Ibid., pp. 191-92.

²⁹Kluckhohn, op. cit., p. 197.

change the image. With everyone thus working, the final answer would come in "common interests"³⁰ for man and woman, where each would and could complement each other and woman's equality would be assured.

Viola Klein, in a similar presentation, believes that if the "common humanity of men and women were re-emphasized, along with the value of the individual personality,"³¹ woman would no longer be in an ambiguous position. This is the traditional argument based on the equality of everyone and embodied in the Declaration of Independence and other "sacred documents," but again, used in a new setting of post-suffrage.

Yet, as it is well to discuss reasons for women's unstable position, her failure in some reforms, and her next important moves, without positive action, all the interpreting produces nothing. Ideals are good and necessary starting points, but they must be made practical. The President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 understood this. Considering the woman from every possible aspect, and in every

³⁰Kluckhohn, op. cit., p. 197.

³¹Klein, "The Stereotype of Femininity," op. cit., p. 11.

attempted pose, the committee hoped to formulate definite plans of action to elevate positively woman's position in American society. Interestingly, the commission, by its very organization, admitted a dilemma for the woman in American society. Specifically, since 1848, the woman began agitating for equality and by 1962, it was consciously recognized that she had not attained it. Some conclusions deduced were the following:

Society must . . . support fully women's right to remain unmarried, their right to a personal life without children, to a career alone or to a life of devotion to a small circle of others.

. . . Now America needs skilled womanpower. The climate of opinion is turning against the idea that homemaking is the only form of feminine achievement. . . . Finally, women can only be given real opportunity by being offered real choices, each one underwritten by fair laws and fair practice and a social climate that ensure that each life pattern will be considered a feasible and dignified one.³²

Here is an ultimate proposal for and about women: to formulate "laws" in the hope of elevating their position. Governmental help is, of course, needed, but the recommendations serve to show the extent to which

³²Margaret Mead and Frances Balgley Kaplan (eds.), American Women, The Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women and Other Publications of the Commission (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 204. (Underlining added.)

the problem for women is considered.

For more than a century the American woman has been agitating for some reform, and once attained, is never satisfied, for there is always one more rebellion needed. In law, education, voting, and other areas, real progress has been made by the woman, but not liberal enough. The cancer and the cure must lie within the woman herself. The pronouncements of a Declaration of Principles at Seneca Falls and the decisions of a Presidential Commission a century later, effect only a vicious circle on an idealistic plane. The source is not touched and cannot, therefore, be changed. The American woman will always be a reformer hoping for a change in her quixotic manner. As David Potter so well stated:

The essential strength of her position has increased, but the combined effect of the manipulation by the media and the emphasis upon monetary earning as a standard for the valuation of work has threatened her with a new kind of subordination, imposed by the system of values which she herself accepts, rather than by masculine values imposed upon her against her will.³³

The sexual passivity so often associated with the

³³David M. Potter, "American Women and the American Character," in John A. Hague (ed.), American Character and Culture, Some Twentieth Century Perspectives (Deland, Fla.: Everett Edwards Press, Inc., 1964), p. 81. (Underlining added.)

woman's character has obviously been applied to her whole mentality, resulting in further inferiority. It will be granted that the stereotype of woman may never change, so rooted is it in tradition and her past reforms, but the ambiguity of her character from reforms, need not be so concretized. If society will permit it, and women will believe that "equal rights do not mean an interchangeable identity with men but scope to lead a diversified life while remaining a woman,"³⁴ perhaps a permanent victory will result. The reform begins--again.

It is very difficult to discuss the woman's character in terms other than here presented. Although deceptively simple in some instances, the characteristics are representative, valid, and pervading. Consider the relatively long period they held sway. First, the woman's character is the ambiguity discussed, and not a convenient escape. So often it is easy to assign such a "broad" adjective and reconcile it in the smallest way. Yet the woman herself was dubious of her position--a personal and deeply felt belief. Her outward actions, through her reforms,

³⁴Lerner, op. cit., p. 611.

belied this special and silent conviction, and it became clearly evident. No approach was considered the ultimate, and several were tried in another certain indication of her vague status.

The stereotype of femininity is also a sure character trait of the woman reformer, and might have been the unconscious cause of her reform. Domesticity, or the "woman's sphere," so often depicted negatively, is the expression of the stereotype. Again, the pose is traditional, and not easily denied or changed. Moreover, the influence of such a trait is pervading in two ways: (1) it often effects a pattern for life; and (2) it applies to women in all phases of the "business sphere." Thus, the two domains, domestic and business, divided for purposes of discussion, become united and further confused.

It might be argued that the conclusions discussed here apply equally well to woman as woman, and not only to woman as reformer. There is some plausibility to the point, but several items are clear: (1) in a seemingly naive statement, the feminist was a woman and a reformer, and the position of woman affected her; (2) the woman reformer, in a division of feminists and non-feminists, understood the needed

reform and took steps to produce it, and this was woman's position; (3) the movement was only forcefully begun in the first half of the nineteenth century when social reform was so prevalent, and the position of woman is so indelibly stamped with the reform character; (4) when the suffrage was achieved, some women were not satisfied at the results, and wanted more change--reform continued. This was not woman as woman improving, but woman as reformer. The passive hoped for a change; the active worked for it, and the resultant reform affected all. Thus, in terms of history, ideas, and influence, the American woman can be viewed in no other way than as a reformer. That is her essential character.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE WOMAN AS REFORMER: A FACET OF THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

When J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur asked his now famous question in 1782: "What then, is the American, this new man?"¹ little did he dream that answers would be coming for almost two centuries. Countless commentators on the American scene have attempted to isolate that one trait which is characteristically American, and countless have failed.² To be sure, all those traits assigned are valid and representative, but limited, and moreover, the antitheses are probably equally true. An obvious solution would be to use a catch-all adjective such as dynamic, complex, or ambiguous, but the broad coverage is not

¹Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth-Century America (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 63.

²It is not our purpose here to describe all the traits assigned to the American. Everything from humor to crises, mobility to land, have been used as the determinants of the American. Judgments are not easily made.

wholly acceptable. Simple, single descriptions are more positive and revealing, although more difficult. More thought is, also, involved, but in the personal satisfaction from a solution, a problem of validity is answered. This validity argument is a basic and necessary preliminary concern. If national character analysis is valueless, discussions are certainly not necessary. However, certain points present themselves as favorable to a study of national character. Briefly, consider some of them.

From the least to the most cogent reasoning, firstly, the mere fact that one is doing a character study is a basic reason for a valid approach: It Is Being Done. Also, there is a psychological need to know what others think of us concerning our own analyses and theirs. By not knowing a character, perhaps problems which exist today concerning nations and people could never be solved. The reasoning is simple but important. Moreover, nations are realities and cannot be ignored, even in the slightest aspect. The argument for validity is important here if for no other reason. As a fourth explanation, in the construct of culture, civilization, and society, the concept of character is extremely important to understand

the totality. In anthropological circles, the study of civilization theory is becoming very important, and many aspects must be examined before a "theory" can be formulated. National character is one of these facets--important in the concept of culture, and a division in the study of the theory of civilization.

Here, then, are some of the reasons why we study a nation's character. The remarks are preliminary, but necessary to our purposes. For we propose to discuss a division within a division: the American woman's character within the totality of the American character. The approach is sound but the attempt has never been made. Perhaps the problem is one of semantics: What is the meaning behind an adjective describing the American character? Does it include all? both sexes? or is it primarily masculine? David Potter would answer "yes" to this last question:

Thus a writer may sometimes make observations on the traits or values of American men, and then may generalize these as the traits or values of the American people. If he did this deliberately, on the theory that since male values dominate the society, they must therefore be American values, we would have to concede that he is aware of what he is doing, even though we might question his results. But when he does so unconsciously, his method may easily lead him to assume first that since American men are dominant, the characteristics of American men are the characteristics of the American

people, and that since women are people, the characteristics of the American people are the characteristics of American women, or in short, that the characteristics of American men are the characteristics of American women.

To avoid this trap, when one meets with a social generalization it is frequently worthwhile to ask concretely, does it apply to women, or only to the masculine component in the population? . . . Does the statement that Americans are individualistic mean American women as well as men? The question seems worth asking, for it appears more than possible that many of our social generalizations which are stated sweepingly to cover the entire society are in fact based on the masculine population, and that if we took the feminine population into account, the generalization might have to be qualified, or might even run in an entirely different direction.³

The argument might seem slightly forced, but the point is made. American women have contributed to American society in a unique way but their character is never discussed or presented. Moreover, major forces have worked upon the woman in different ways rendering a character type unique from the American man's. By considering the American woman from several viewpoints, at least a beginning will be made to a study of her character. The larger emphasis will, of course, be on what has preceded this conclusion. By both the

³David M. Potter, "American Women and the American Character," in John A. Hague (ed.), American Character and Culture, Some Twentieth Century Perspectives (Deland, Fla.: Everett Edwards Press, Inc., 1964), pp. 66-67.

limits and the scope of this dissertation, the general historical forces or the commonly assigned American traits cannot be fully discussed. The direction can, however, be presented.

A first major historical force is the much publicized and often discussed frontier. Frederick Jackson Turner presented his famous thesis in masculine terms, but the application to women is equally evident. For here were no feminists or suffragettes to hinder the development of the empire. The pioneer woman stood side by side with the men sharing the burdens and the hardships, and often directing the family herself. This was true equality and a sharing of the resultant American traits: individualism, optimism, and self-reliance.⁴

Urbanization was also an important force in releasing the woman from her traditional position and allowing her to compete with man. In the city, with its concomitant business offices, typewriters, etc., the woman could be employed in jobs which developed

⁴Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion, A History of the American Frontier (2d ed.; New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960), discusses these and other traits as resulting from the frontier influence.

into her own domain. It became a special "frontier"⁵ for American woman, and furthermore, enabled her to achieve a start at economic independence.

Similar to urbanization in influence was industrialization. With all the machines used for industry, the later assembly-line devices, and increased production, women were needed in the labor force.

Hard labor, associated with the physical stamina and strength of men, was sacrificed to skill, and in the latter the woman could compete. This was a great step towards promoting woman's position. "It amounted to a de facto form of female emancipation."⁶ Mechanization was also introduced into the home with the so-called "push-button appliances," which enabled woman in her traditional domestic role, to abandon the home more easily and assert herself in the "world outside." In the resultant clubs, societies, and socials, the American woman, as mother, was given an alternative to her primary role, although a limited one.

A change in the economy of American society also affected woman in her domestic role. This is

⁵Potter, op. cit., p. 69.

⁶Harvey Wish, Society and Thought in Modern America (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), p. 129.

related in the move to the cities where the subsistence and self-sufficiency of a farm no longer was necessary. Woman now became a consumer with all the attendant and important duties. She assumed a new role akin to manager in a small business, and was constantly recognized in the position. Advertisers appealed primarily to her as both decision-maker and "buyer" for the family. The pose was not far wrong, and with it a new function was given to the woman, stemming from her domestic sphere.

The occurrences of war present a fifth historical force in elevating the position of women. Briefly and simply, since the Civil War, women were needed in the positions vacated by men, especially in the labor force. Also the disillusionment which often occurs after wars, especially World War I, served as an impetus to further emancipation for women. For example, in the 1920's, the symbolic free woman, the flapper, appeared, born in a world conflict, and she still lives in her uninhibited daughters.⁷

A more recent social reform concerning women

⁷See George E. Mowry (ed.), The Twenties, Fords, Flappers, and Fanatics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963): "Freedom for the Second Sex," pp. 173-86.

is the whole question of birth control. Involved here are the dual standards of sexuality and morality, the biological role of women, and the domestic function resulting from such attitudes, as contributing to woman's inferior status. It was argued that some method of hindering conception in women would free them for "equal" opportunities. Interestingly, a woman, Margaret Sanger, was the prime mover behind this reform, and thus continued the sustained reforming of a Susan B. Anthony, in another area.⁸ The question is still being discussed and will not be answered shortly. It serves to show, however, a recent and continuing movement of the American woman as reformer.

Other social reformations or transformations affecting the American woman could, of course, be discussed, and those presented could be developed more fully. However, all occurred, as it were, in the "course of history" and affected the woman's position in a subtle way. No reforming was actually necessary

⁸The Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College Library, Northampton, Massachusetts, has the Margaret Sanger Papers, recently receiving the whole collection at the reformer's death. They are presently being processed and catalogued.

in these areas for woman to elevate her position, yet the advancement occurred, however slightly. Evidence is clearly added to the argument advanced above. The American woman's position was changing, slowly, but changing, yet the zeal for reform created an impatience in the female half of the nation. As the reforming continued these other forces were operating effectively in a more quiet revolution. To be sure, the problems of both movements were the same, but the feminist used a direct approach. In addition, each of the factors of American social history just discussed, has been used to delineate the American character and could conceivably be applied to women. However, the traits are not unique to the American woman, and do not involve her reform movements. Our conclusions must come from the latter.

Similarly, it would be possible to list the traits often assigned to the American as his character and apply them to women. In more cases than not an argument could be made that women do fit into each category and need no special character analysis. Consider several of the most often used features. Individualism, both active and passive, has operated effectively for the American woman. She could actively

apply its formula to initiate her own movements, and passively accept the attendant rights and freedom implied in the term. Optimism and its variant expressions also affects the woman's character. Always present was the hope of achieving a better status and better goals. Self-reliance, an alternate of individualism, the abundance of material wealth, the flood of immigrants in various waves, folklore, success, and other theories, as to the definition of an American, could, additionally, be applied to American women. Yet the experience of the woman was more distinct and unique and must be found in this exceptionalism.

The most basic characteristics of the woman are inherent in the word reform. Implied is the idea of change and a willingness to experiment as opposed to a satisfaction with the status quo. In this trait, the American woman is consistent with the whole experience of America, and perhaps more liberal. For in all her hopes for change was the knowledge of a better position in society, at least, not worse than before a reform was initiated. Added to this change is an aggressiveness and agitation,⁹ responsible for many

⁹Gilbert Vivian Seldes, The Stammering Century (New York: John Day, 1928), p. 410.

significant results. It was a dynamic kind of activity necessary to advertise a problem. A class, conveniently labelled "gunpower women,"¹⁰ evolved and have harbored the discontent for many years.

To this basic willingness to change as a consequence from reform, is added the "democratic spirit,"¹¹ of an ideology. Included are all the ideas associated with a democracy and the heritage given to everyone. Women used it as a basis of equality and displayed an intelligence, a cleverness, and an adaptability to the American scene. Choosing the fundamental ideas of a democracy was both intelligent and consistent: the woman reformer avoided a radicalism in her approach. The cleverness entered with the various arguments employed, and the ingenuity long associated with the American was agreeable to the woman. Women reformers chose the "favorable terrain,"¹² to build an ideology, and in so doing, "proved them-

¹⁰Pearl S. Buck, Of Men and Women (New York: The John Day Company, 1941), uses this classification, the others being, "talented women," and "vocation in the home.

¹¹Hendrik de Leeuw, Woman, the Dominant Sex (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), p. 89, considers this the dominant trait in woman's search for equality.

¹²Seldes, op. cit., p. 292.

selves infinitely superior to the men [reformers],"¹³ who selected immovable objects to change. Idealism, in the sense of dreams and utopias, also enters into the ideology of the woman. She began with a "conquer-the-world" feeling symbolized in the ballot, but realistically abandoned the attack in a commonsense awareness that practicality was required. This became a major result to decades of reforming.

The songs, cartoons, and drama associated with the various women's reforms add further to her character traits. Not only are the ideas presented above, re-emphasized, but another image is added: the martyr, victim, oppressed, or "underdog" in an unequal society. In every imagined pose the woman presented herself as discriminated against and thereby hoped to evoke pity or sympathy, primarily in the male portion of the population. This is perhaps another reason why so many have commented on the "cult of the woman"¹⁴ in American society. Americans notoriously and habitually support the underdog or handicapped in any situation. Viewing

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴James Truslow Adams, The American, The Making of a New Man (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 373, describes the woman and the flag as the only two real cults in America.

the woman in such a state, the man has falsely flattered her and insincerely raised her status.¹⁵ These adjuncts to the woman's rights movement ably demonstrate this martyr-pose.

A final image arising from the women's reform movements in America is a stereotype of domesticity. It is a woman's natural role, usually valid and characteristic, but can become confining in an excessive emphasis. Negatively, the "mystique-approach" of a domesticity stereotype affected women in areas, other than the implied "motherhood," where she hoped to gain more of an equal position. For the American woman, a rule of conduct was initiated, outlined, and often followed. However, sometimes, the woman reformer did appeal positively, in a sentimental plea as mother, to elevate her status to an equality with man's, and the results were efficacious, but limited. The stereotype persisted, and domesticity became a pervasive trait of the American woman. Ironically, the American feminist both accepted and then declined the stereotype through her arguments, but the image was always present.

It must be remembered that the American woman was operating in a male-dominated society, from the

¹⁵de Leeuw, op. cit., blames man for the talk centering around "Momism."

beginning of her reform movement until after the suffrage was obtained. The only difference in the years which elapsed was in the quality of her inequality. In 1850, the woman was inferior. By 1930, she was recognized in a small way as equal, but she was not expected to succeed too well--and she was a rung just below a complete acceptance by man:

This is the dilemma that she is now expected to attain a competence in the realm of men's affairs but that she must never succeed in this realm too much. It is well for her to be intelligent, but not intelligent enough to make a young man feel inferior; well for her to find employment and enjoy it, but not enjoy it enough to be unwilling to give it up for the cradle and the sink; well for her to be able to look after herself but never to be so visibly able that it will inhibit the impulse of the right man to want to look after her; well for her to be ambitious, but never ambitious enough actually to put her personal objectives first.¹⁶

Here is what the reforming accomplished--an elevated, but still inferior position for the American woman. Until more reforming occurs, perhaps no change will come. Yet the woman must again take the initiative. John Greenleaf Whittier poetically summarized the problem very well:

¹⁶Potter, op. cit., p. 81.

In School-Days

Still sits the school-house by the road,
A ragged beggar sunning;
Around it still the sumach grow,
And blackberry vines are running.

Within, the master's desk is seen,
Deep scarred by raps official;
The warping floor, the battered seats,
The jack-knife's carved initial;

The charcoal frescoes on its wall;
Its door's worn sill, betraying
The feet that, creeping slow to school,
Went storming out to playing!

Long years ago a winter sun
Shone over it at setting;
Lit up its western window-panes,
And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls,
And brown eyes full of grieving,
Of one who still her steps delayed
When all the school was leaving.

For near her stood the little boy
Her childish favor singled;
His cap pulled low upon a face
Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow
To right and left, he lingered;--
As restlessly her tiny hands
The blue-checked apron fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt
The soft hand's light caressing,
And heard the tremble of her voice,
As if a fault confessing.

"I'm sorry that I spelt the word;
I hate to go above you,
Because,"--the brown eyes lower fell,--
"Because, you see, I love you!"

Still memory to a grey-haired man
 That sweet child-face is showing.
 Dear child! the grasses on her grave
 Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life's hard school,
 How few who pass above him
 Lament their triumph and his loss,¹⁷
 Like her,--because they love him.¹⁷

In short, this is the woman's experience. The American woman, trained in such respect from such "love" for so many years, was not easily "equalized" with man. Almost a century of reforming accomplished much, but not enough. Why have we no American women heroines? Some say we must look to the heroes of a country to understand its character.¹⁸ This may be the final solution to the woman's problem, retrospectively, and in the future. The image of the "lady" forever intruded, and persisted, and perhaps hindered woman's progress and discouraged the resultant serious studies. Ladies are no longer needed, but "feminine reformers" are, and producing heroics. Then, perhaps, the woman will know herself, her character will more clearly

¹⁷The Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, and Company, 1857), p. 429.

¹⁸Dixon Wecter, The Hero in America, A Chronicle of Hero-Worship (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), is the best and most enjoyable discussion of this point of view.

emerge, and the American character made more complete. Yet the pose of the reformer and all its implications cannot be forgotten or abandoned. It is the basis of a character analysis for women. Indeed, the American woman is, above all, a reformer.

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VITA AUCTORIS

John Louis Oldani, the son of A. Charles and Mary F. Oldani, was born on September 26, 1942, in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended Nativity of Our Lord Grade School for eight years, and in 1956, entered McBride High School in St. Louis, from which he graduated in 1960.

In September of 1960, he entered Saint Louis University and received his Bachelor of Arts degree; Magna Cum Laude, from that institution, in June, 1964, with a major in English, and minors in History and Latin.

In September of 1964, he received an NDEA Fellowship in American Studies to Saint Louis University. With a major emphasis in American History, and minors in American Literature, Geography, and Anthropology, he remained in the capacity of an NDEA Fellow for the academic years, 1964-1967.